



Children's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

The top three sub-\$200 children's tablets... Can they de-throne the iPad? (page 6)



PLUS

- 61 Timely Reviews
- Fisher-Price's Famous iPad Seat
- Sites & Videos about Cookies (the kind you eat)

On the cover: Four of the best tablet options for children this year.

CTR, December 2013 Vol. 21, No 12, Issue 165

Acer C720 Chromebook*
 Agent P: DoofenDASH
 Alphabeasties Amazing Activities*
 Animal Alphabet Singers
 Appy Chanukah
 Ariel's Musical Surprise
 Baby's Playful Hands
 Barbie Digital Makeover Mirror
 Binny's Advent Calendar 2013
 Brain Jump With Ned the Neuron*
 ChatterPix*
 ChatterPix Kids* (or ChatterKid)
 ClickN Kids Tablet
 Club Penguin*
 CoLAR Mix*
 Dr. Panda's Home*
 Drawnimal*
 DreamWorks Dragons Adventure
 FunTab Pro (Android Tablet)
 Hopscotch - Activities for Kids

Hopscotch: Coding for Kids*
 iPin Laser
 Jokes School
 Just Dance 2014*
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 Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 ReMIX
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 Puppeteer
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 Rocks HD

Rube Works: The Official Rube Goldberg Invention Game
 Sago Mini Ocean Swimmer*
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 Splash Math Kindergarten*
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 Tabeo e2
 Tearaway*
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 TinyTap
 Toca Hair Salon Me*
 Toca Mini*
 Touch, Look, Listen: My First Words*
 Vinci MV
 Wubbzy's Dance Party*
 Wubbzy's Magic School*

* Donotes an "Editor's Choice."
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December 2013

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Well folks, there goes 2013; and what a year it's been for children's interactive media. Last year at this time, we predicted more "app maturation," due to the fact that an increasing number of smart programmers (many of them parents) who are learning the tools and perfecting their craft. That's certainly happened (see page 4). We're also seeing more affordable, powerful Android tablets, backed by Google Play. As you can see on page 6, while the \$300 16 GB iPad Mini remains the best option for children for the second year, the new Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 Kids (\$200) is now a worthy choice.

Besides the hardware news, you'll find a 61 reviews into this issue, including our coverage of the controversial Fisher-Price iPad seat. This issue is packed for good reason ... as we wind down the year, we had a lot to fit in. So charge your batteries and fasten your seatbelt ... there's a lot of news. First the headlines.

Announcing the 2014 KAPi Winners

What products and people have raised the bar for quality and innovation for children's interactive media in 2013? If you visit <http://kapiawards.com> you can see the results of the 2014 KAPi prize, a collaborative search for excellence that is now in it's 6th year, from CTR and LIDT (Living in Digital Times). The winners are listed below, and the annual prize is given at the International CES in Las Vegas on January 8th. The idea behind the KAPi award is to ask the smartest people we (Robin Raskin and I) know to brainstorm about products and people that have made a difference, or have raised the bar for quality and innovation for children's interactive media. This year's winners include:



2014 WINNERS

- 1. Innovation:** Neos, PlayWorld Systems. A technology enhanced outdoor play system.
- 2. Best App for Younger Children:** Storybots by JibJab Media. An animated series of products that combine humor and learning.
- 3. Best App for Older Children:** The Human Body by Tinybop; a delightful exploration of human anatomy.
- 4. Best Tech Leveraged Toy:** Furby Boom by Hasbro, for showing that an app can actually enhance a toy's play pattern.
- 5. Best Video Game Software:** Disney Infinity by Disney Interactive Studios
- 6. Pioneering Team:** Touch Press
- 7. Best Educational Technology:** Hopscotch by Hopscotch Technologies, an app that can empower a future programmer
- 8. Pioneer:** David Kleeman, a dedicated champion of quality for the content that ends up on a child's screen.

Behind the choice: our thanks to the 2014 Jurors— Warren Buckleitner, *Children's Technology Review*; Dan Donahoo, *GeekDad and Project Synthesis*; Chip Donohue, *Erikson Institute*; David Kleeman, *Play Science (recused from the pioneer award)*; Richard Gottlieb, *Global Toy Experts*; Rebecca Levey, *KidzVuz.com*; Ann McCormick, *Learning Friends*; Frank Migliorelli, *Migidea and NYU*; Robin Raskin, *Living in Digital Times*; Reyne Rice, *Toy Expert*; Mark Schlichting, *Noodlworks*; Carly Shuler, *Play Science*; Andrea Smith, *Mashable*; Scott Traylor, *360KID*. (jurors are not allowed to vote or debate in categories in which they had a commercial interest). There is one vote per juror. Judging was done using shared documents and conference calls. Visit <http://www.kapiawards.com> for more information.

Continued on page 6

Your Subscription is Your Key to 11,184 Archived Reviews

Your paid \$30 or \$120 subscription to *CTR* includes exclusive password access to the new *Children's Technology Review* database — a collection of reviews going back to 1985. If you've lost or forgotten your password, please call 800-993-9499 between 9-3 PM EST.



5 sites & ten videos about

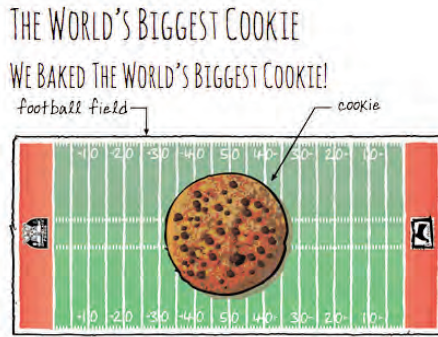
Cookies

LittleClickers is made possible by Computer Explorers. Safe, fun Internet explorations for children.

LittleClickers is brought to you by Computer Explorers, who is offering camps on programming. Visit www.computerexplorers.com to learn more. The web-based (html) version of this page is at <http://www.littleclickers.com> with live links, plus a place to report any errors. Note that CTR and COMPUTER EXPLORERS do not have commercial interests in the sites listed on this page. Librarians and teachers are permitted to copy this page for non-profit use. To suggest a future topic or to report a bad link, please contact the editor, Warren Buckleitner [WB] warren@childrenstech.com, or the web editor, Megan Billitti [MB] megan@childrenstech.com; or call 908-284-0404 (9 - 3 PM, EST).

Here's a fact of life: Kids love cookies, and so do most grownups. Can eating a cookie be good for you? Do you know where the cookies in the store come from? Start up your browser, and let's learn about cookies—the kind you can eat.

1. Guess: how big is the world's largest cookie?
At bitly.com/1f2c6ig you can learn how a company called Immaculate Bakery made a single chocolate chip cookie that was 102 feet wide, nearly the width of a football field. It required inventing a special oven.



2. Pick One: what's the favorite kind of cookie?
A. Oatmeal
B. Peanut butter
C. Chocolate chip
D. Sugar

That's a tricky question. It depends what state you're in, according to the Reader's Digest bitly.com/1jEX4mb. Most people pick some variety of chocolate chip cookie, however. Here's one of my (Megan's) favorite recipes bitly.com/1dWEQN2. What about the cookies you buy in the store? Nabisco Oreos win according to foodprocessing.com <http://bitly.com/1Bqbnf>



3. T/F Can Oreo cookies become addicting?
Laboratory animals pick Oreos over rice cakes, and so do kids. Why? The combination of fat and sugar activate the "feel good" parts of the brain, just like a drug. Here's the link to the Connecticut College study <http://bitly.com/1f2eSEk>. Learn more about the history of the Oreo cookie at the Bakery Network site bitly.com/18PBQQw

4. Can cookies be good for you?
Yes, according to Simple Nourished Living bitly.com/18iPFGL You're running late for school, and want to grab something to eat on the go for breakfast. Substitute honey for sugar, and put in nuts and raisins. The ingredients are key to making a healthy cookie.



5: What kind of cookie does Cookie Monster avoid?
Wikipedia <http://bitly.com/1bZk02E> says that Cookie Monster is allergic to peanut butter cookies, and likes chocolate chip the best. Where did Cookie Monster come from? In Jim Henson's 1966 test commercial for General Foods, he introduced a character that looks a lot like the Cookie Monster. <http://youtu.be/5QngRWeEJGo>

GET BUSY!

Let's make some cookies without using an oven! Here are some recipes bitly.com/1iQBgpX

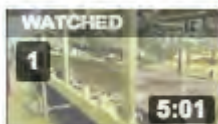
What kind of cookie are you? Here's a quiz to find out: bitly.com/1gkjsx0



Cookie videos

Here's our YouTube videos for this month

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCbVHzUUEKwmd777rbMNM-eVDpO2GZQw->



December '13 Editor's Choice

Here are summaries of the 22 highest rated products in this issue.

Babies and Toddlers

Drawnimal, \$1.99, by Lucas Zanotto <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/drawnimal/id586239095?mt=8> was one of the delightful surprises we spotted in Cinekid's 2013 AppLab. Children first pick a letter, and then see just part of an associated animal. Some of the animals are quite surprising -- the alligator snaps his jaws, and the bear growls. For ages 2-5.

Sago Mini Ocean Swimmer, \$1.99, by Sago Sago is like "Forest Flyer" (CTR June 2013) but you swim instead of fly. There's no place you can't visit, and no way to fail. It's best to think of this app as a busy box that promotes exploration, feelings of control, and discovery; and hopefully some conversation. For ages 2-4.



Preschool

Alphabeasties Amazing Activities, \$3.99, by CJ Educations <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/alphabeasties/id644280330?mt=8> is ideal for introducing and providing informal practice with upper and lower case letters. We liked the way the hints, music and narration can be toggled on/off. For ages 3-6.

Dr. Panda's Home, \$2.99, by Tribeplay <http://www.drpandagames.com> contains 20 such jobs found in Dr. Panda's Home, where a tribe of animated animal characters host each challenge. If you've played a Dr. Panda app in the past, you'll appreciate the extra content in this app. For ages 2-7.

Touch, Look, Listen: My First Words, \$1.99, by Storytoys <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/touch-look-listen-my-first/id731859081?mt=8> is a "visual dictionary" looks and acts like previous StoryToys apps, with 3D pop-up pages that magically unfold. It has clear illustrations and multiple language options. See also Farm 123. All in all, this is an excellent app. For ages 2-4.

Wubbzy's Dance Party, \$2.99, by Cupcake Digital, Inc. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/wubbzys-dance-party/id635871029?mt=8> is a responsive, well-designed app lets your child play along with Wubbzy and pals. There are 20 pages with text highlighting and lots of responsive hot spots, four mini-games that highlight shapes, colors and counting and two videos. See also Wubbzy's Magic School, with similar design. For ages 3-up.

Wubbzy's Magic School, \$2.99, by Cupcake Digital, Inc. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/wubbzys-magic-school/id626284893?mt=8> takes you to Moo Moo the Magician's Castle, where you learn that magic really does happen when you believe in yourself and try your hardest. A solid app. See also Wubbzy's Dance Party for a similar design. For ages 3-up.

Preschool and Kindergarten Creativity

We're making a new category for this issue due to the number of creativity apps. While many work with younger children, they'll well suited for all ages.

ChatterPix Kids (or ChatterKid), \$free, by Duck Duck Moose <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/id734046126?mt=8&uo=4&at=1013RC> lets you take a photo and make it talk by superimposing a mouth, that magically syncs to recorded sounds. If you've ever wanted to make your dog talk, this is your app. If you want to post your photos on facebook, use a separate app, called "ChatterPix." (without the word kids in the title) For ages 4-up.

ColAR Mix, \$free, and \$2.99, by Puteko Limited <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/colar-mix-3d-coloring-book-app/id650645305?mt=8>. Coloring pages have been around for decades and augmented reality (AR) for years, but it took an app and some black-line PDFs to bring them together. For ages 3-up.

Mickey Mouse Clubhouse: Paint & Play, \$4.99, by Disney Publishing Worldwide <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/mickey-mouse-clubhouse-paint/id658426204?mt=8> is a well designed coloring experience that is unique because it lets children experiment with the relationship between 2D and 3D objects. Coloring programs abound; which is why this is so refreshing. For ages 3-12.

Toca Hair Salon Me, \$2.99, by Toca Boca is the third and best edition of Toca Hair Salon lets you import your own photos, and morph them onto the animated faces of your haircut customer; complete with blinks, yawns and stretches. Warning -- once you get started, it is hard to stop. It's always nice to see a great app get better; such is the case with Toca Hair Salon Me. For ages 3-up.



Toca Mini, \$2.99, by Toca Boca <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/toca-mini/id718082838?mt=8> lets children playfully explore some powerful graphic design concepts with this 3D figurine decorating experience. While this program looks simple, it's actually a template that can lead to some powerful ideas. For ages 3-8.





Early Elementary

Splash Math Kindergarten, \$free/\$9.99, by Studypad, Inc.

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/splash-math-grade-1-5/id672658828?mt=8#> is a well designed, highly structured math drill. You can monitor your child's progress, and it supports multi-players. For ages 4-6.

Strangebeard: The Pirate Princess, \$4.99, by StoryToys

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/strangebeard-pirate-princess/id706000405?mt=8> is fun and fast paced. The 36 page ebook adventure contains 3D page turns and nine responsive pirate-themed games. For ages 5-up.

Upper Elementary

Brain Jump With Ned the Neuron, \$1.99, by Kizoom

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/brain-jump-with-ned-the-neuron/id703097320?mt=8> is a leveled game of concentration on steroids. The overall idea of this game is fun, and puzzles, which all involve short term memory, are well leveled. For ages 6-11.

Club Penguin (the App) by Disney Interactive, Inc.

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/club-penguin/id505544063?mt=8> is well designed, but contains recurring in-app purchases. This has the potential to greatly expand Club Penguin's reach and Disney's wealth; and puts it on the same level as Candy Crush. For ages 8-14.



Winner for the Education category for the 2013 KAPi Prize: Hopscotch; a programming experience for iPad

Just Dance 2014, \$30, by Ubisoft, Inc. is the newest edition of Just Dance. It mixes new moves with new songs, and it's now easier to save the recording of your dancing if you have the PS4 or Xbox One. For ages 7-up.

Mario & Sonic at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games, \$50, by Nintendo of America is your ticket to Russia, for the Sochi 2014 Olympics. The gameplay works well with the motion sensing abilities of the controllers. For ages 6-up.

Hardware

Acer C720 Chromebook, \$200,

by Acer has 8.5 hour batteries, costs \$200 and looks like a full featured laptop. It proves that the affordable Chromebook, powered by Google Docs, will have a growing presence in more backpacks over the next year. An HDMI port lets you connect to larger displays. Built in software includes everything Google. For ages 6-up.



Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 Kids, \$200 stands out as the best Android tablet for kids this fall, combining a well designed device with the Google Play app store and a physical home button. For ages 3-up.

Hopscotch: Coding for Kids, \$free, by Hopscotch Technologies

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/hopscotch-coding-for-kids/id617098629?mt=8> was a delightful surprise; that we discovered from the KAPi prize juror discussions. It's a great introduction to the concept of programming with drag and drop commands. For ages 7-up.

Tearaway, by Media Molecule Ltd. comes from the creators of LittleBigPlanet.

This innovative PlayStation Vita game is only available only as a download. As you explore, you tilt the screen and use the back touch screen quite frequently. Learn more at <http://tearaway.mediamolecule.com>. Our testers summed it up this way "this awesome game has left me speechless." For ages 8-up.





Fisher-Price's Now Famous iPad Infant Seat

Fisher-Price makes all sorts of seats for infants and toddlers. But one in particular has created controversy. Fisher-Price says it's a "grow-with-me seat for baby that's soothing, entertaining, and has a touch of technology, too." But that "touch of technology" is a horrible idea, given the age range, according to a Dust or Magic poll on Facebook (17 to 0 on last count). The potential abuse by caregivers, who might use the system to deliver videos to placate a baby, or the fact that it removes the possibility for face-to-face interaction by parents, is too serious to ignore, they say. What exactly is this experience? To find out, we made a

video by placing the camera exactly where the baby's head would sit. It's called What Baby Sees: Inside the Newborn-to-Toddler Aptivity Seat for iPad, at http://youtu.be/POLu_tAX5dw. This lets you "get inside" the seat and watch the app from the baby's point of view. You can see that Fisher-Price has good intentions, with the built in timer and the motion detection (slightly interactive) features. But the fact that the iPad's function can change with the touch of an app icon, turning that visual baby soother into the "vast wasteland" that people like Fred Rogers spent a career fighting -- is just too much for some people. And now that vast wasteland can be exactly 10 inches from a restrained baby, delivered on a retinal display. Continued on page 35.

The Best Tablets for Kids

They're slightly faster and slightly cheaper, and are designed to tumble down the stairs. But many Android tablets are risky to buy because they act like toll roads that let you on at a low cost, but make you pay to continue on your journey. We counted over 24 pocket-sized devices for kids; but your child has just one pocket. What's the best choice? See page 7.



A Toast to David Pogue

It's now been a month since David Pogue's rather unceremonious last column in the New York Times, and if you're like me, you're suffering from "Pogueian withdrawal." It's not helped by the fact that Walt Mossberg left the Wall Street Journal a few months earlier. We decided to take a pause to review a reviewer instead of a gadget. See "A Toast to David Pogue" at <http://childrenstech.com/?p=13723>

LittleClickers: Cookies

CTR's own Megan Billitti is an expert cookie maker and she's shared some of our favorite recipes on page 3. She's also collected some sites and videos to help you learn more about making (and eating cookies). Don't miss first videos of Jim Henson's Cookie Monster, at <http://youtu.be/5QngRWeEJGo>.

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Announcing CTR Weekly: Three Noteworthy Children's Apps This Week

We're pleased to announce a new weekly email publication, following the success of a weekly format we created originally for the New York Times, sans ratings.

With this new more timely format, we excerpt our full reviews, which you'll still get in our review database and monthly issue, down to a few sentences describing "why we like it" and "need to know." This copy will be provided along with a screen shot and rating details. We'll also include direct links to the respective stores (e.g., iTunes, Android or Amazon).

WHEN: Every Wednesday at 6:00 AM

WHAT: Three bite-size reviews of noteworthy children's apps.

WHO: Delivered to paid CTR subscribers

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eBook Retreat • Apr 27-29, Honesdale, PA

AppCamp • Jun 8-10, Marshall, CA (new location)

Institute • Nov 2-4, Lambertville, NJ

www.dustormagic.com



Human Body, The
(\$2.99 on iTunes, iPhone), for ages 4-up.
Why we like it: The first in a planned series, this New York City designed app lets children explore the wonders of the human body, without embarrassment. The result is one of the best human anatomy experiences we've reviewed. The animated graphics are clear, yet free of gore. Of particular note are the working models of the human eye and ear, that incorporate the features of the camera and microphone.
Need to know: You can create individual profiles for each child, plus parent options let you track children, and multiple language options are available. See the full review for the list of languages. Works with all devices, except the iPad 1.

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

Holiday 2013 Best Tablets for Kids

By Warren Buckleitner

You're in a toy store, and you're in a rush. Your seven-year-old has outgrown her InnoTab and wants a "real" tablet. You'd love to get her a \$500 iPad, but that is completely out of your budget.

You notice a brightly colored endcap. Ahh... there's a tablet, just for kids, and it is built around a version of Google's Android. The durable, brightly colored bumper looks like it could survive in the back of your car, and the promotional video promises excellent parental controls and plenty of preloaded apps.

It's been marked down to \$99.99; just 1/5th the price of an iPad!

You grab a box and scan the specs... "8GB of storage" but you think "I can buy a \$20 micro SD card and bump that up" What could go wrong?" You toss it in your cart.

Oops.

You just purchased a "loss leader" designed to trap you inside a specialized app/book and music store designed to use techniques akin to putting candy in the checkout lines of supermarkets: show kids something they want, so they can get their parents to buy it. Keep the initial price low but the potential for sales high.

Read This First

Before you choose a tablet for any child, keep these points in mind.

- ✓ **The preloaded software we found varies greatly in quality from device to device.** A tablet might contain free or "lite" versions, and in some cases inappropriate content. What a hardware company calls "educational" may not wander beyond shapes, colors, numbers and letters. The Tabeo (the Toys R Us tablet) includes apps for toys like Furby and professional wrestling videos. The better educational tablets are the XO Learning Tablet, Little Scholar and the LeapPad Ultra.
- ✓ **Cameras, batteries, speakers, on/off buttons and screen quality should be considered.** There's a wide range in terms of the quality and integration of the parts and software that makes up one of these products. Many of the lower cost Android tablets had tinny speakers, fuzzy screens, hidden buttons, and batteries that seemed to like to "sleep" as the default condition.
- ✓ **Features like parental controls don't always play well with the underlying Android operating system.** The Tabeo uses a browser-based solution for parental controls from France called Edition Profil that forces you to preregister your tablet before you can use it.
- ✓ **Check the internal storage.** Most Android tablets have just 8 GB of onboard memory, and will require an additional 32 GB micro SD card (about \$20 on Amazon.com) if you want to download and store a small library of apps, books or movies.
- ✓ **Kids want power.** A child's tablet should have the storage and processing power to run apps like Google Earth or Skype. Not all tablets have access to larger, independent app stores where these types of apps can be found. The three largest and most desirable app stores are iTunes (like an Ocean); Google Play (like a great lake), and Amazon App Store (a smaller lake, with a lot of good books). All the rest are sometimes muddy puddles.
- ✓ **A tablet represents a down-payment on future content.** This device will be used to take photos and store apps, music and books. Once you invest in the Apple-based content stream, you won't be able to run purchased apps on Android; and vice versa. That's why this initial decision is important.

Little, Medium, or Big — Which is the Best Screen Size?

Mobile devices for children pretty much come in three sizes: 4 inch (phone sized), 7 inch (Kindle sized) and 10 inch (original iPad sized, which has often been associated with the word tablet."). Each has advantages and disadvantages when it comes to children's content.



THE RESULTS AT A GLANCE

All things considered, which products offer the best dollar/experience ratio for a child?

1. iPad Mini, 16GB With Non-Retinal Display (\$300, Apple.com) has the best content and features per dollar because it can run iPad apps. Apple's **iPod Touch** (\$230) is also a good choice, although it can't run iPad apps.

2. Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 Kids (\$200, Samsung.com) is the best Android option because it successfully integrates solid hardware with a home button and the Google Play app store. The app gap between the iPad Mini and this tablet is helped in part by lower price.

3. Kindle Fire HD (\$130,

Amazon.com) was released last year. It can't run as many apps, but it does equal the iPad in terms of access to books (remember those?) and

movies, by way of Amazon's subscription-based **Kindle FreeTime Unlimited** (\$5/month) at <http://amzn.to/181Q7Dv>. The Kindle reminds us that tablets can be used for reading.

4. LeapPad Ultra (\$150, LeapFrog) makes it into the top four, for being the "un-tablet" option. You'll spend much more for software that does much less, but you'll get a carefully engineered experience that looks and sounds much better than last year's **Innotab 3s** or the **LeapPad 2**. And no more AA batteries.

5. Nintendo 2DS (\$130) is the only way you can play Pokémon these days. The new 2DS is an excellent bridge between the newer 3DS software and the hundreds of older 2DS cartridges that are often well-designed, gimmick-free, and won't run on iOS or Android.

Kindle FreeTime Unlimited
Featured New Titles (142)
Sesame Street (29)
PBS Kids (41)
Nickelodeon (211)
Disney (103)
Houghton Mifflin (38)
Kindle Books (1,001)
Amazon Instant Video (350)
Android Apps (210)



Apple's new Kids Apps & Games section, at <http://bitly.com/1bLaClS>, groups apps by age and genre. It also includes a page that explains how in-app purchases work.

Last year Chris Crowell, a Kindergarten teacher, has noted that when given the choice between a smaller iPod and larger iPad running the same apps, his students would often prefer the smaller device. It was easier to hold, and "more personal." But smaller tablets come at the expense of screen resolution, and many apps are designed for 10 inch screen. So the fonts and keyboard can be nearly impossible to use. That makes the middle, 7 inch format a good compromise.

THE RESULTS

Apple Still Rules and Android-Based Options are Making Incremental Progress

The iPod Touch and iPad were never explicitly designed for children, yet they remain the best choices when taking all the factors of quality into account. Apple also leads when it comes to gimmick-free parental features, with new features like Guided Access that let you lock down your iPad to one app. The new iTunes Kids & Games section <http://bitly.com/1bLaClS> makes it easier to find new apps. While the initial investment in hardware isn't cheap, the option with the best dollar/content ratio is the 16 GB non-retina display **iPad mini** (\$300) inside one of the many foam cases, like the new **Big Grips Slim** (\$30, www.biggrrips.com) or **GripCase** (\$40, www.gripcase.com). This is the lowest cost of entry to the wonders of iPad apps waiting in iTunes.

Android-Based Tablets

Android-based options are even more plentiful this year and quality varies even widely. These devices are more similar than different. You'll find two cameras (front and back), only 8 GB of storage, and empty micro SD card slots if you want to add memory. In the olden days, you needed to purchase batteries, these days it appears it is SD cards.

At the top of the ratings category is the **Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 Kids** (\$200, Samsung) because it combines Samsung's hardware with Google's software, including the apps in Google Play. Strengths include the separate physical home button on the front panel, the higher quality cameras. These features, especially the gimmick free Google Play are well worth paying \$50 more than the host of mid-range options.

Slightly less desirable but still viable are a host of other Android tablets. The best "out of the box" experience comes from a newcomer, School Zone, with the **Little Scholar** (\$200, School Zone). School Zone's definition of "scholar" consists mostly of didactic experiences (lots of colors, shapes numbers and letters) however, and getting to mainstream apps and games means jumping through some hoops to get to the Amazon store. So no Google Earth. This lack of access to mainstream apps is a strike against any many types of Android tablets.

We also liked the two size additions to the **Kurio line** this year; especially the \$100 4 inch and \$230 10 inch models. Each has a slightly faster processor and well-intentioned parental management features; but the hardware specs are mid-range, and the app selection is throttled.

The most risky tablets you can buy are the **Tableo e2** and the **FunTab Pro**. They combine poor app selection with a sloppy interface, weak batteries and clunky parental controls. Here's a closer look at the non-Apple options.

Device	Ease of Use	App Selection	Durability and Safety	Design Features	Good Value	Percentage
iPad Mini	9	10	10	10	9	96%
Kindle Fire HD	10	9	10	9	9	94%
Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 Kids	9	9	9	9	9	90%
LeapPad Ultra	10	6	10	9	8	86%

Wait before you wrap: Before you wrap a tablet as a gift, do some setup work

You want your child to have a positive out-of-the-box experience. So carefully unpackage your new tablet, charge the batteries, and set up their profile. If it's an iPad, include an iTunes Gift Card, or pre-install a few Android apps that you think he or she will like. Remember that you're about to give your child a device that can take photos and hours of videos. What will happen to this content? Develop a plan for storing and archiving your child's digital work on your laptop, so it's backed up... just in case your child leaves her tablet in the backyard, on a rainy day.



Kindle Fire HD. This is last year's \$140 Kindle, which now has a big brother, the retinal display Kindle Fire HDX (\$230). The good news is that the older model (the HD) has been improved with a faster processor and a slightly lower price, improving the "bang for the buck" factor. Apps come from Amazon's Kindle FreeTime, for access to better quality content. Details are at amzn.to/197JmGK. The cost is \$5/month per child or \$10/month per family (subtract about \$2/month for Amazon Prime subscribers). With individual profiles, everything in their library is theirs—no sharing a home screen with siblings or parents and no losing their place in a movie or TV show when someone else picks up the Kindle Fire. The service uses an "all you can eat" model.

Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 Kids is easy to pick out of the crowd. It also stands at the head of the pack when it comes to ease of use, parental features and app selection, making it our Android choice for a child's tablet. At its core, this tablet is a modified mainstream Galaxy Tab 3 with an application manager that includes a timer and the ability to choose which apps your child can see. Especially noteworthy is the physical home button. \$200. Best for ages 3-up.

The **XO Learning Tablet** features a distinctive green rubber bumper with a handy hanging ring, plus 173 preloaded apps and hundreds of open-source books that vary in quality and content. You'll find strong content management options for up to three children and Google Play access. 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. 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. Battery life is good, but could be better, and the on/off and volume buttons are buried by a thick layer of silicone. Given the cost (\$150) and compared to the other Android tablets, the XO is competitive, especially given the solid parent management features. Best for ages 3-12.

ClickN KIDS Tablet (\$100, ClickNKids.com) is a bare-bones, gimmick-free Android kids tablet with Google Play and a lower quality screen and sound. The child management features are easy to figure out and use, once you figure out how to turn on the tablet (there are two similar looking on and home buttons, that make this simple job confusing). The tablet has a split personality -- one for kids (designed by Kiddoware) and the other for adults, to manage the content. It is easy to set up this tablet, especially if you have a Google Play account. We were able to easily download Google Earth, and after a bit of scrambling, add it to the child's menu. There is 8 GB of storage plus a micro SD card; the battery life is on par with other Android tablets. Given the price, this is a viable tablet option.

Little Scholar is a new entry from School Zone; the Michigan-based publisher known for higher quality flash cards, software and workbooks. Now a lot of the content is on modified Lexibook 7 inch tablet (www.mylexibooktablet.com) with 8GB of RAM and a Micro SD card. There are no surprises on the hardware aspects of this tablet: two cameras, a Micro SD card slot, headphone jack, 1 DC port, 1 Mini HDMI port, and Lithium battery; all housed in a rubber bumper. Two things set this tablet apart: the overall ease of the out-of-box experience, second only to the Samsung Kids Tablet, and the quality and quantity of the pre-loaded content, that includes nearly the entire library of SchoolZone digital content (that can function without Wi-fi) plus videos, e-books and songs. The videos include Charlie & Company with music by Brian Vander Ark. This is the anti-Tabeo and it succeeds in giving parents a solid non-Leapfrog, non-vTech alternative. www.schoolzone.com, \$200. Best for ages 3-7.

Ease of Use	6	46%
App Selection	5	
Durability and Safety	6	
Design Features	4	
Good Value	2	



FunTab Pro (Android Tablet)

FunTab Pro is a poorly designed, affordable 7" multi-touch screen Android tablet with limited access to apps. Parental features are provided by Zoodles Kids Mode. The screen and sound test were among the lowest quality when compared with the others. You can see our test, at <http://youtu.be/qZ9WmuvO8tQ>. Features are typical, including an HDMI port, a 1.2GHz Processor, 1GB RAM, 8GB of internal storage with a MicroSD card slot and cameras. One rare exception: the HDMI cable is included. Also noteworthy is the sculpted controller like grips on the bottom that feel good, but they add quite a bit of heft to the overall tablet. The limited features and lack of apps makes the FunTab not very fun. \$150.

Ease of Use	9	86%
App Selection	9	
Durability and Safety	8	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	



XO Learning Tablet

Ease of Use	8	84%
App Selection	9	
Durability and Safety	8	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	



ClickN Kids Tablet

Ease of Use	9	82%
App Selection	7	
Durability and Safety	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	8	




Little Scholar (Android Tablet)

Ease of Use	9	82%
App Selection	6	
Durability and Safety	9	
Battery Life	8	
Good Value	9	



Nabi 2

Ease of Use	9	80%
App Selection	5	
Battery Life	8	
Durability	9	
Good Value	9	



Kurio 4, 7, and 10

Tableo e2 over promises and under performs, and sadly does not improve upon 2012's poorly rated model. Compared to other tablets in the sub-\$200 price range, it has dropped close to the bottom of the rankings, due to limited features, limited app selection, clunky parental controls and average technical features.

The hardware base is made for Toys R Us by Arnova (www.arnovatech.com) and offers no more surprises than most other 7 inch tablets; such as a Micro SD expansion slot, 2 cameras, HDMI out and 8 GB of RAM. The screen and sound are OK. There is no physical home button, and the inset volume rocker is hard to use (and find) through the slot on the lime-green snap-on protective bumper.

Let's put the worst first. The parental features are provided by the French-made Edition Profil's Parental Filter, which was designed for computer-based browsers and not 7 inch tablets. But your tablet can't be used until you register for "safety reasons." This strong-armed registration requirement is rude, clunky, and can't be skipped; and the "protection" is limited to browser content only; ironically, the most worrisome content comes pre-installed. The most questionable app is the WWE Active (World Wrestling Entertainment) app that will populate your child's screen with a very non-wholesome twitter stream generated by big time wrestling fans; with links to the videos. Of course you can choose to take these apps off, but this requires a proactive parent with the time to screen the apps. Gender bias and marketing are in the DNA of Tableo. The Toys R Us app store (designed by a company named "Spoiled Milk Limited") comes with a built-in allowance system that lets you pre-load your child's account. Toys R Us clearly wants (and needs) to be a player in the digital content business and is trying to use this tablet as the Trojan Horse -- a way to get an app/music/book/movie store into your child's playroom. But with the limited app selection and such a poorly designed interface, this horse won't go very far.



Toy Based Options

Toy based options from Leapfrog and VTech might have a lower entry fee (\$100) but they make less sense this holiday season, given the cost of their software and batteries. With the exception of the **LeapPad Ultra** (\$150 <http://www.leapfrog.com>) battery life and screen quality have stayed the same as last year, and Android options offer better app selection on multi-touch screens. The LeapPad Ultra as with past gadgets from Leapfrog, combines the two things parents want above good game play -- durability and security. But now, for the first time in Leapfrog history, the screen looks great, and there's no need for AA batteries.

The three Ultra headlines are 1) the beautiful, clear, 7 inch touch screen; 2) the rechargeable batteries and 3) extremely locked down Wi-Fi, used primarily to download more apps and play heavily curated videos. But the weaknesses include a lack of apps, some laggy screen responsiveness in some of the apps and less-than-intuitive screen rotation. Also, you can't upgrade the storage, and the speakers are OK. The main drawback, however is when compared to Android and Apple-based options, there's only a fraction of content this device can run, and it's controlled by one source: Leapfrog. The screen is not capable of multi-touch. Onboard features include 8 GB of storage with no expansion, easy to set up wireless and cartridge compatibility back to Leapster 2 cartridges. The screen looks like a typical 7 inch Android tablet, but it works differently, because it is non-capacitive. The screen we tested was both clear and responsive, although typing was tricky because the screen would sometimes double enter a letter. For parents looking for a controllable, locked down digital backyard for their children, who are willing to pay more for the much less content, LeapPad Ultra represents a major advance over the LeapPad 2. Best for ages 4-9.



Video Game options

Nintendo 2DS (\$130) is a viable, affordable, durable way to access non-Apple, non-Android, non-leapfrog content. Translation, if you like well designed games like Pokémon, Nintendo has provided the hardware bridge between the huge library of existing DS cartridges and the 3DS games that won't work on an older DS. Many of these games are well designed and gimmick free. Nintendo has done little to improve such things as the graphics quality since last year, and it still uses a 2004-vintage mono-touch screen grip. But it provides enough exclusive content to merit a purchase.

About the Tablet Ratings

We start backwards when we create a rubric; considering the target population (kids) what the attributes we think they value in a device. We assume they want access to the latest apps and things like strong batteries, quality sound, a clear screen and easy to use controls.

- ✓ **Easy to use.** If you hand the tablet to a novice, can they turn it on, adjust the volume and find the home screen? With many Android-based tablets, simply finding the "on" button is a mystery. Leapfrog and VTech win this category. Can you get out of whatever you get in to, adjust the volume, charge the batteries or pause a game?
- ✓ **App availability.** Hardware is only as good as the software. Apple leads this category by a wide margin. The other largest non-Apple store is Google Play.
- ✓ **Durable.** Will it survive a tumble down the stairs?
- ✓ **Parental controls.** Can you limit Internet, app and YouTube access, or customize the device to your child's ability and/or interests? Is it possible to have accounts for different children?
- ✓ **Design features:** Good screen; cameras, clear speakers, necessary ports, enough storage and child/adult friendly controls.
- ✓ **Value.** What do you get for what you pay? How does it related to the current market prices?

Finally, there's no substitute for actual kid testing. We did not have time to properly kid test each tablet. Watch our screen and sound comparison of the 16 devices, at <http://youtu.be/qZ9WmuvO8t>



Feature Reviews

DECEMBER, 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.

Acer C720 Chromebook

What has 8.5 hour batteries, costs \$200 and looks like a full featured laptop (in fact weighing just a bit more than on iPad air)? The Acer C720 Chromebook, that's what. It proves that the affordable Chromebook, powered by Google Docs, will have a growing presence in more backpacks over the next year.


This device does not have a touch screen; and it won't run most games. If you need Adobe or Microsoft Office to do your work, you'll find that you'll quickly start bumping into limitations. However, for 80% of most student work, email and web-based work, the Chromebook is an affordable, durable, plug-free solution.

Specs: Powered by an Intel Celeron processor with the power saving Haswell micro-architecture, 16GB of storage, and 2GB RAM memory. It's slim enough to fit into a book bag, purse or backpack, and lightweight: just 2.76 pounds, so it is easy to take to classes, meetings or anywhere to stay in touch. The 11.6-inch "ComfyView" display has a 1366x768 resolution, and the speakers were comparable to the Microsoft Surface or iPad. There's a single front webcam for video chatting, built in Wi-Fi and two USB ports (one 3.0 and one older 2.0 port). An HDMI port lets you connect to larger displays. Built in software includes everything Google: Google Search, Gmail, YouTube, and Hangouts plus 100GB of free Google Drive storage for the first two years after purchase, so files, documents, photos and more are stored safely in the cloud. Also included: Google Play Music All Access and 12 free Gogo Inflight passes. With 8 + hour batteries, this computer could be the perfect flight companion.

Details: Acer, . Price: \$200. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Google Chrome.

Teaches/Purpose: a laptop computer. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 12/14/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	93%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	10	





Alphabeasties Amazing Activities

Based on the book by Sharon Werner and Sarah Forss, Alphabeasties Amazing Activities (\$3.99 by CJ Educations) is ideal for introducing and providing informal practice with upper and lower case letters. Content includes 26 letter tracing puzzles (one per letter), plus a find and color activity where you spot the hidden upper/lower case letters in a single scene. There's also a flashcard component that lets you touch and hear each upper and lower case letter.

The app effectively uses repetition and reinforcement to link meaning to the letters. For the letter A for example, you gradually fill in (or reveal) an Alligator (made entirely by As) by tracing a letter A. Both upper and lower case letters are mixed together in this app, and the fonts are also varied, so children will see the letters as they appear in the real world. Teachers will like the way the hints, music and narration can be toggled on/off. If you're looking for an example of good pedagogy, look no further than this app.

Details: CJ Educations, www.cjeducations.com/. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, letter formation, upper/lower case letters. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 5/17/2013. [WB]

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






Animal Alphabet Singers

Great acting meets limited play value, with this cast of 26 singing animals that help to teach and reinforce the letter sounds, in *Animal Alphabet Singers* (\$3.99 by Think Smart Games, formerly Mentor Interactive). The layout is clean and uncluttered; and the animals are voiced by a cast that sounds like they could've stepped out of a Broadway play; but there's not much to do, and the interaction style feels hurried.

Four modes of play include Meet the Animals, The Animal Alphabet Singers, Meet the Letters and Guess the Animals. Meet the Letters takes the user through the alphabet one letter at a time. Each letter has a different animal assigned to it, for a total of 26 animals. When a letter is a tapped, the user will simply hear the letter selected, followed by the name of the animal.

Meet the Animals introduces each of the 26 different animals in the app that children will learn about. Similar to the Meet The Letters, this part of the app goes through the alphabet individually introducing you to the animal assigned to the letter. This area of the app is enhanced with a short dialogue. For example, when the user touches L, you will hear, "Lion starts with L. And I am a lion." If the lion is tapped again, a dialogue with a few facts about the lion is revealed.

Animal Alphabet Singers shows all 26 animals, one per letter. When a letter is touched the corresponding animal sings the letter. Unfortunately this is not very responsive, so you can't really make the animals sing. It is easy to toggle between upper and lower case letters. Finally, Guess the Animals and Letters is a multiple choice quiz.

Strengths include the use of unconventional animals (you meet your first narwhal) and a carefully constructed dialogue that uses every opportunity to introduce a phonemic relationship. We liked the expert lip syncing and unconventional dialogue. The letters and construction of the narration around the letters is a particular strength of this app.

Weaknesses include some pushy prompts, some less than top quality illustrations, and an inability of a child to control the choir of animals that is limited in song selection and variety (you never stray beyond the alphabet song). The animal sounds range in quality.

Despite these weaknesses, the "learn by association" pedagogy can work. As children get to know the animal personalities, they get to know each letter. If you're looking for a solid way to playfully introduce your child to letters sounds, this app is a good choice.

Created by Think Smart Games with direction from Christopher Cerf (one of the Sesame Street designers) and Marilyn Jager Adams.

Details: Think Smart Games, . Price: \$3.99. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: letters and letter sounds, upper and lower case, early reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 12/4/2013. [WB]

Appy Chanukah

Designed to be a one-stop-shop where parents can teach their kids everything about Chanukah, this eBook shows you how to pronounce, read and write key words like Menorah and Sevivon; you can also sing along to songs such as Mi Yemalel and Maoz Tzur. Games include Light a Menorah, and a 3-level Chanukah Puzzle. Created by Alin Wagner-Lahmy, founder of Appy Holidays.

Details: The Appy Holidays, www.theappyholidays.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: Chanukah. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.5 stars. Entry date: 11/25/2013. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	8	70%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	6	
Good Value		





Ariel's Musical Surprise

Mixing strong visual effects and music with a musical underwater play theme that is enhanced by sets of physical toys (sold separately by Jakks Pacific), this free app, called Ariel's Musical Surprise, is designed to provide a variety of motion based play opportunities. If you own the toys, you can unlock additional features when they are scanned with the camera.

The toys we tested include Ariel's Musical Instrument Set (\$25), Ariel's Musical Light Up Dress (\$30) and Ariel's Magical Kitchen (\$95). Don't worry -- on it's own the app is still fun, although it is more fun with the toys. The biggest weakness to this app is that the play value in the individual games feels shallow.

There's no shortage of cool effects, but these have less value unless there are solid activities. According to the credits, this app was created by Disney Mobile (not Disney Publishing Worldwide) for Jakks Pacific. More info at www.jakks.com/dreamplay. See the video review at <http://youtu.be/bPnB65QgDdA>

Details: Disney Publishing Worldwide, www.DisneyDigitalBooks.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone (360 MB). Teaches/Purpose: music, rhythm. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 10/21/2013. [WB]

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

82%



Baby's Playful Hands

The follow up to Baby's Musical Hands (Editor's Choice, CTR August 2011), this app turns your iPad into a multi-touch musical toy that is a good developmental match for a young baby -- or a cat.

This app is most noteworthy for what it doesn't do... any tap on one of the 15 colored squares will play musical notes, while stars burst from your fingertips. The app is designed to allow babies to explore musical relationships.

Content includes six instrument sounds. Because the sounds and colors change at random, feelings of control are reduced. It would be better if these could be controlled in a parents menu. The app uses a pentatonic music scale that means notes work together, and there are no ads or in-app purchases.

Details: Streaming Colour Studios, www.streamingcolour.com. Price: \$.99. Ages: 1 -2. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPhone Touch. Teaches/Purpose: causality, music. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 11/15/2013. [WB]

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

80%



Binny's Advent Calendar 2013

Ready to count down the days to Christmas? This nicely illustrated smart calendar knows what day it is automatically, and it serves up a simple activity each day. The art comes from AU illustrator Binny Talib, and it puts the days in order, on a street scene. Because children can swipe left or right, they can see how many days until Christmas in a concrete way. The games are not innovative, but follow tried and true play patterns. There are puzzles, songs to play on a vintage record player; and secret items that can be revealed by scratching. This would be a great bedtime app. While there are no third party advertising or in-app purchases, there are links to the author's home page and social media.

Details: Binny Design & Illustration, www.binny.com.au. Price: \$.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 5.1 or later). Teaches/Purpose: memory, creativity, units of time. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 11/20/2013. [WB]

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

82%





Brain Jump With Ned the Neuron

Like a leveled game of concentration on steroids, this set of memory games uses playful, animated characters that look like they might have come from an episode of Spongebob Squarepants.

While we didn't like the "brains grow stronger with exercise" hype, the overall idea of this game is fun, and puzzles, which all involve short term memory, are well leveled. Your mission is to help Ned the Neuron and his friend through each level by quickly and accurately completing three types of memory games.

The more questions you answer, the faster you can get to the next level. There are 54 levels that vary in difficulty, plus an animated cartoon that explains how the brain works. Kizoom is based in Oakland, CA.

Details: Kizoom, www.kizoomlabs.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 6-11. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch, Android. Teaches/Purpose: memory, brain science and learning. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 11/11/2013. [WB]

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

88%



ChatterPix Kids (or ChatterKid)

Talking animal or puppet apps like Talking Tom are common these days. But this one lets you take a photo and make it talk by superimposing a mouth line over your photo, and then recording up to 30 seconds of sound. The lip syncing is automatic, and amazingly accurate, although it doesn't allow for curved mouth lines. So, if you've ever wanted to make your dog talk, this is your app. And for some reason, its free.

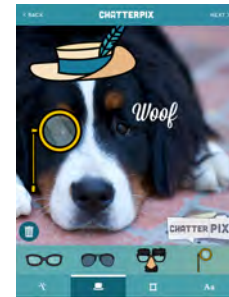
There are two versions of the app, which can get confusing: ChatterPix; and ChatterPix Kids, also called ChatterKids. Both are free, but the first has Social Sharing features activated, with one touch access to services like Facebook. If you don't want this possibility, you're supposed to download ChatterPix Kids (aimed at 13 and younger) instead, because the social services are removed.

Note that you can still save your work to your photo gallery. If this is a free app, what's the catch? Duck Duck Moose wants to spread the ChatterPix brand which is watermarked on your work, not unlike JibJab.

Details: Duck Duck Moose, . Price: \$free. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: aural communication, creativity, humor. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 11/21/2013. [WB]

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

92%



ClickN Kids Tablet

ClickN KIDS Tablet (\$100, ClickNKids.com) is a bare-bones, gimmick-free Android kids tablet with Google Play and a lower quality screen and sound. The child management features are easy to figure out and use, once you figure out how to turn on the tablet (there are two similar looking on and home buttons, that makes this simple job confusing).

The tablet has a split personality -- one for kids (designed by Kiddoware) and the other for adults, to manage the content. It is easy to set up this tablet, especially if you have a Google Play account. We were able to easily download Google Earth, and after a bit of scrambling, add it to the child's menu.

The tablet comes in your choice of eight colors, and has a 7 inch screen with a front-facing camera; management is limited to one child. There is 8 GB of storage plus a micro SD card; the battery life is on par with other Android tablets. Given the price, this is a viable tablet option.

Details: ClickN KIDS, Inc., <http://corporate.clicknkids.com/>. Price: \$100. Ages: 3-12. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: an Android tablet. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 10/2/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	8
App Selection	9
Durability and Safety	8
Design Features	9
Good Value	8

84%





Club Penguin (www.clubpenguin.com)

Recurring in-app purchases meet a seven year old's desire to collect things to decorate an igloo, in this new iPad version of Club Penguin (\$free, <http://appstore.com/clubpenguin>). The free download lets you have "many of the same gameplay and social features" found in the virtual world, plus recurring in-app subscriptions.

I downloaded the app, and logged in to find my five year old Club Penguin, still dressed like it was 2009, with 15,367 coins. But when I tried to buy a holiday wreath for the igloo, I got the message "unlimited access to Igloos & Furniture requires a paid membership." In other words, you can still see cool stuff, but when you touch to get it, you are told that you must buy a membership. Prices are still \$8/month, but you have to remember to cancel.

New areas allow penguins to hang out and role play like they do online, and teleport directly to other rooms, their igloos or wherever their friends are playing in the app. Parents have the option of purchasing recurring monthly memberships within the app, which work across all versions of Club Penguin environments. The app version allows up to 40 penguins at once, inside locations that include the Town, the Dance Club, the Clothes Shop, and Coffee Shop. New games include Pizzatron 3000 and Smoothie Smash. As of this year, languages include English, German, Portuguese, French and Spanish.

First launched Fall 2005, this is both a free- and paid-subscription app, and a flash-based MMO (massive multiplayer online game) designed for children 8-up. There is no advertising content, but the service is effective at promoting relentless nagging behaviors in a quest for a full membership (\$6/month or \$58/year). Consider yourself warned.

After registering (which requires a valid Email) and logging in, children are asked to choose a penguin. At any time and child can use a map to jump in or out of a game, or visit their own igloo that serves as a home base for saved awards, games, and/or decorations. Over time, children can earn money to purchase more decorations.

It is very easy to socialize. Just start typing, and your message appears over your head. You can also click on another penguin to invite him or her to your igloo, throw a snowball or make an addition to your Buddy List. There are two chat options. Ultimate Safe Chat uses a predefined list of greetings, questions and statements as well as emotes, actions and greeting cards. These users can only see other Ultimate Safe Chat messages. Standard Safe Chat allows players to type their own messages. Every message is filtered to automatically block inappropriate words. In addition, the program claims that moderators watch what's going on. Club Penguin was originally created by New Horizon Interactive in Canada for Disney.

Details: Disney Interactive, Inc., www.disney.com. Price: \$free and \$6/month, \$58/year. Ages: 8-14. Platform: Internet Site, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: language (typing), socialization, sorting, classification, creativity, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 9/27/2006. [WB]


CoLAR Mix

Coloring pages have been around for decades and augmented reality (AR) for years, but it took an app and some black-line PDFs that you can download from www.colarapp.com to bring them together. First released last year (2012) in New Zealand by Puteko Limited, a division of HIT Lab NZ, this app brings black line coloring pages to life. The images animate themselves, walking around as if they were alive. You can watch your images from any angle, play or pause your animation, and zoom in for closer look. Note that this app doesn't work on older iOS devices (iPod and iPhone3 or earlier).


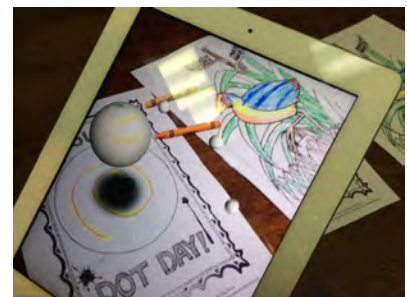
Four sheets come free; eight are sold for \$2.99 as an in-app sale. To print out pages, visit <http://www.colARApp.com>. The locked pages are shown to children, which could tempt them into making an in-app sale.

Details: Puteko Limited, colarapp.com. Price: \$free, and \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, visual relationships. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 11/3/2013. [WB]

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




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



Dr. Panda's Home

Did you know that cleaning the toilet, mopping the floor and recycling trash can be fun? Just call them "mini-games". There are 20 such jobs found in Dr. Panda's Home, where a tribe of animated animal characters host each challenge to help you earn coins to unlock prizes. If you've played a Dr. Panda app in the past, you'll appreciate the extra content in this app. Nice touches include a full night-day cycle, so they might make breakfast in the morning and set an alarm clock at night. You can get out of any activity at any time, and there's no way to fail; for example incorrect matches just fall to the ground. There is no print and no language, which represents a missed learning opportunity, and the sorting levels are pretty haphazard. We also noticed that some of the graphics seem hurriedly done. In once case after you brush your monkey's teeth, they disappear. But these are minor points that children will happily overlook, as they mop the floor. Learn more at <http://www.drpandagames.com>.

Details: Tribeplay, www.tribeplay.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android, Kindle (114 MB). Teaches/Purpose: money, telling time, classification, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 11/19/2013. [WB]

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



Drawnimal

One of the delightful surprises we spotted in Cinekid's 2013 Applab was Drawnimal; an app that contains 26 animals... one per letter. Children first pick a letter, and then see just part of an associated animal. The idea is that you could place your iPad or iPod Touch on a large piece of paper, and then touch the screen to wake up the animal. Some of the animals are quite surprising -- the alligator snaps his jaws, and the bear growls. This app operates on a very simple premise: causality -- touch and make something happen. The result is a high level of engagement by the children. The design is less than perfect. The main menu hides part of the alphabet, which is presented in a grid, and children don't know how to get out of a particular animal picture (you're supposed to swipe down). Created by artist Lucas Zanotto, from Finland. Also, while we appreciated the English translation, we noted the use of the word "zed" for the "z" in zebra. These are minor issues. All in all, this simple design works with younger children, and makes them feel in control. The app is available in five languages (English, Spanish, French, German and Italian).

Details: Lucas Zanotto, www.lucaszanotto.com/. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-5. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: causality, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 11/12/2013. [WB]

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



FunTab Pro (Android Tablet)

The FunTab Pro is a poorly designed, affordable 7" multi-touch screen Android tablet with limited access to apps. Parental features are provided by Zoodles Kids Mode, which gives children access to a pre-selected library of apps. The screen and sound test were among the lowest quality when compared with the others. See <http://youtu.be/qZ9WmuvO8tQ>

Apps include Angry Birds, Where's My Water?, Fruit Ninja and Cut the Rope, as well as off brand eBook versions of Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Three Little Pigs and others.

Features are typical, including an HDMI port, a 1.2GHz Processor, 1GB RAM, 8GB of internal storage with a MicroSD card slot and cameras. One rare exception: the HDMI cable is included. Also noteworthy is the sculpted controller like grips on the bottom that feel good, but they add quite a bit heft to the overall tablet. The tablet comes with your choice of three colored snap-on faceplates, in blue, red, and pink. The limited features and lack of apps makes the FunTab not very fun.

Details: ematic, <http://www.ematic.us/>. Price: \$150. Ages: 3-12. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: An Android tablet for children. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.3 stars. Entry date: 8/13/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	6	46%
App Selection	5	
Durability and Safety	6	
Design Features	4	
Good Value	2	





Hopscotch: Coding for Kids

We've been asking for it; and somebody finally delivered ... a Scratch-like programming experience on the iPad. But let's be clear -- Hopscotch isn't a replacement for Scratch; instead it's a great introduction to the concept of programming with drag and drop commands. Hopscotch is also missing some things Scratch has, namely a huge library of projects, the ability to make stages, and more creative possibilities. But, you can't use Scratch on an iPad.

Hopscotch takes programming down to the most simple level, letting children build programs using building block commands. You can make a character move, draw, and collide with another, or sense motion when you tilt the screen or sound when you talk into the microphone.


Like Scratch, you start by adding one or more sprites (in this case, bug-like characters) from a set of 10 set options. Once you have a sprite, your next job is to tell it what to do when the "Play" button is touched. You can add as many sprites as you like, or put in a text based sprite, in case you want to have writing on the screen.

To make your first program, you drag blocks onto a programming area and decide how many steps you want to move. Like Scratch, the programming blocks can be easily moved around and reordered. Because they are color coded, you start to understand that they have different functions. There are six types of variables: Movement (move, rotate, change x by, change y by, set rotation, set position and set speed); Drawing (leave a trail, set line color, set line width, clear); Control Flow (repeat/end, wait); Appearance (scale by, set opacity, change costume, bring to front, send to back); Variables (set variable, change variable); and Math (random).

We wished there was more variety in the choices of the sprites, and wanted the ability to draw our own. We'd expect a future version of Hopscotch that incorporates the camera, and we're also wondering how this is going to be funded (the current price is "free", so what's the catch?).

Details: Hopscotch Technologies, www.gethopscotch.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: programming, logic, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 12/3/2013. [WB]

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




Just Dance 2014

The newest edition of Just Dance mixes new moves with new songs that include Pitbull featuring Chirstina Aguilera's "Feel This Moment", Psy's "Gentleman", and other songs such as Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive".


Features include the World Dance Floor, the game's first online multilplayer mode so you can dance with anyone anywhere in the world. Competition modes include boys vs. girls or crew vs. crew. Players can track their standing on global leader boards, check out stats about other players, and see community updates. In the new On Stage Mode, you can dance, lead two back-up dancers, and even sing if you want. The Custom Sweat Mode lets you personalize your Just Sweat workouts by creating custom playlists and tracking calories. The Puppet Master mode has been upgraded to the Party Master mode, giving the player controlling the Wii U GamePad more options to MC the party, including choosing the next dance move, picking new songs, and giving silly challenges to up to four other players.

There's not much to say about this game since it recycles many of the songs from it's last game and failed to bring other artists and new songs into this game. It's now easier to save the recording of your dancing if you have the PS4 or Xbox One. We liked how the PlayStation Camera for PlayStation 4 worked as great as Kinect, and that you don't need a PS Move or Wii remote controller like in PlayStation 3 or Wii/Wii U, respectively.

The PlayStation 4 and Xbox One versions are better than the others, and feel less recycled.

Details: Ubisoft, Inc., www.ubisoft.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Wii U, Wii, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4. Teaches/Purpose: dancing, gross motor development. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 6/12/2013. [WB]

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






Kurio 4, 7, and 10

NOTE: The 2013 edition of Kurio comes with a faster processor and a new \$100 4 inch model.

Here's a summary of the Kurio 7: well-intentioned parental management features meet underpowered hardware and a less than clear screen and limited app availability. Standard features include a micro-SD slot, HDMI out, USB and a headphone jack.

Kurio comes in three sizes -- 4 inch (\$100), 7 inch (\$150) and 10 inch (\$200).

The onboard management system lets you create custom profiles for up to eight people. We especially liked how you can create custom search rules or app collections for each child. This includes the ability to give each child their own screen name. So why the lower rating?

First, because of app availability. Kurio wants to channel you into their app store, where they can control -- and profit from -- your purchases. The latest update claims to work with the Amazon.com app store; a promising feature we did not try.

Peripherals include headphones, and a car holder is designed to convert the tablet into a mobile media center that attaches to the back of a seat rest. Kurio was made in France by Kidz Delight. See the CTR preview video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coov40lJ200>. Visit <http://www.kurioworld.com/us/>. Kurio was made by KD Interactive.

Details: KD Interactive, www.kurioworld.com/us/. Price: \$150. Ages: 4-12. Platform: Android tablet. Teaches/Purpose: an Android tablet for children. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 3/4/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	80%
App Selection	5	
Battery Life	8	
Durability	9	
Good Value	9	



LeapPad Ultra

LeapPad Ultra, as with past gadgets from Leapfrog, combines the two things parents want above good game play -- durability and security. But now, for the first time in Leapfrog history, the screen looks great, and there's no need for AA batteries.

The three Ultra headlines are 1) the beautiful, clear, 7 inch touch screen; 2) the rechargeable batteries and 3) extremely locked down Wi-Fi, used primarily to download more apps and play heavily curated videos. The parental features are among the best we've tested. It is easy to setup a profile for a child by age, and many of the apps automatically adjust to this level. We also liked how a child can personalize the home screen, using the front camera for a profile photo.

Weaknesses include a lack of apps, some laggy screen responsivity in some of the apps and less-than-intuitive screen rotation. Also, you can't upgrade the storage, and the speakers are OK. The main drawback, however is when compared to Android and Apple-based options, there's only a fraction of content this device can run, and it's controlled by one source: Leapfrog. Leapfrog says it has 800 songs, books and older LeapPad cartridges that run on Ultra; but just 11 are Ultra native. Apps can cost \$5.00 for downloads; cartridges are as much as \$25 each.

Internet access is called LeapSearch by Zui, a specialized web browser with no search options, and a seven-inch screen is designed to help children learn to write using a stylus while supporting mono-touch experiences. The screen is not capable of multi-touch. Onboard features include 8 GB of storage with no expansion, easy to set up wireless and cartridge compatibility back to Leapster 2 cartridges.

The screen looks like a typical 7 inch Android tablet, but it works differently, because it is non-capacitive. If you examine the screen closely you'll see it is covered by a flexible thin plastic membrane that uses light for calculating position. To learn more about this technology, investigate the Neonode zForce technology from Sweden. The screen we tested was both clear and responsive, although typing was tricky because the screen would sometimes double enter a letter.

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.

For parents looking for a controllable, locked down digital backyard for their children, who are willing to pay more for the much less content, LeapPad Ultra represents a major advance over the LeapPad 2.

Details: LeapFrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$150. Ages: 4-9. Platform: LeapPad, LeapPad Ultra. Teaches/Purpose: basic skills mostly related to math and reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 6/24/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	10	86%
App Selection	6	
Durability and Safety	10	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	





Little Scholar (Android Tablet)

School Zone; the Michigan-based publisher known for higher quality flash cards, software and workbooks, now has it's own digital platform, thanks to low cost Android tablets. The Little Scholar tablet is an adapted Lexibook 7 inch tablet (www.mylexibooktablet.com) with 8GB of RAM and a Micro SD card. There are no surprises on the hardware aspects of this tablet: two cameras,a Micro SD card slot, headphone jack, 1 DC port, 1 Mini HDMI port, and Lithium battery; all housed in a rubber bumper.

Two things set this tablet apart from swarm of similarly-priced Android competitors: the overall ease of the out-of-box experience, second only to the Samsung Kids Tablet, and the quality and quantity of the pre-loaded content, that includes nearly the entire library of SchoolZone digital content that can function without Wi-fi, plus videos, e-books and songs. It's also turned School Zone into a video publisher: they've used the new platform to deliver a series of videos called Charlie & Company that feature a dog, with music by Brian Vander Ark.

We liked that there is no registration or credit card required at start-up; no apps to download; no upsells for buying more apps; no cartridges to lose; no lite or partial-version apps; no ads and no worries. This is the anti-Tablet and it succeeds in giving parents a solid non-Leapfrog, non-vTech alternative.

Weaknesses include no Google Play access (we see this as a big strike against any Android tablet), although additional Android apps can be purchased through the built-in School Zone Market which is provided by SlideMe (www.slideme.org). It is possible to download and install the Amazon Appstore; both require setting up an account, registration and a credit card. We were able to download and make accessible Netflix, YouTube and Angry Birds with no problems from the Amazon Appstore.

This tablet is evidence that a smaller, passionate publisher can use partnerships with hardware producers to deliver gimmick-free content.

Details: School Zone Publishing, www.schoolzone.com. Price: \$200. Ages: 3-7. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: school readiness, reading, writing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 10/28/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	9
App Selection	7
Durability and Safety	9
Design Features	8
Good Value	8

82%



Lonely Beast 123, The

Simple, clear animated screens invite the question: can you count to 12? This app -- featuring the famous large black beast from Irish illustrator Chris Judge, gives you a reason.

The second in the Lonely Beast Series, the app contains 12 screens with something to count. Each features "The Beast" (a large, silent, hairy, black creature who might make a nice pet) who sometimes helps out with the counting. You touch items to count them, and hear them counted outloud. Like the first Beast app (ABC's) the interactive elements are limited. In addition, some of the screens contain items that invite a touch, but don't do anything. However, the graphics are simple and playful, and failure is not an option. Learn more at Pilcrow: <http://www.pilcrow.ie/>

Details: James Kelleher, www.pilcrow.ie/. Price: \$.99. Ages: 2-4. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, counting from 1 to 12. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 11/19/2013. [WB]

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

84%





Magikid Numbers

Made in China, this is a nicely illustrated and clearly narrated set of storybooks designed specifically to teach number-related words.

Each page had numerals either hidden in the illustrations, or used in the context of a sentence. Your job is to find and touch the hidden numerals to earn points. These in turn earn stars. You also can earn points by touching related sets, in a timed arcade-style game. The art is excellent, although there are some interactive design issues. For example, you can't touch the numerals until the narration is finished, and not all the numerals do something. In addition, it's not clear which numerals you've already discovered. This is the first English release for Magikid Numbers, and it has been localized very well. The series consists of ten storybooks, one per number. The first chapter is free to download but costs \$6.99 to unlock books 2-10.

Details: Magikid, www.magikid.com. Price: \$6.99, \$free for the first level. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, number words (in English). Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 11/14/2013. [WB]

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



Mario & Sonic at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games

Here's your ticket to Russia, for the Sochi 2014 Olympic Games. Events include curling, skiing, and figure skating pairs, as well as a new event: snowboard slopestyle.

Our tester, Corey, said: "I like how this game has variety and while the events may not exactly mirror the Sochi 2014 events, you will have fun. The gameplay works well with the motion sensing abilities of the controllers. The multiplayer events, such as the four man bobsled, are fun, especially when all four players have to push the big bobsled down co-op style.

I like the night views of the events; reminding me of Christmas cheer, and Sonic and Mario make a game like this better. Most of the games work with the Wii remote."

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Wii U. Teaches/Purpose: sports. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 6/12/2013. [WB]

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



Mickey Mouse Clubhouse: Paint & Play

This well designed coloring experience is unique because it lets children experiment with the relationship between 2D and 3D objects. It is also seasonal; featuring items that can change throughout the year. The new content is delivered automatically by way of app updates. In the version we reviewed, there was a holiday theme, mixed in with plenty of mouse ears. In this edition, children decorate the Clubhouse with snowmen, a gingerbread house, and a Christmas tree.

Along with the traditional coloring and fill items, there's a magic wand that turns the items in to fully animated 3D characters.

Other content includes the ability to make cupcakes for the bake sale, use an in-app camera to create your own textures and a Mousekemusic Player. Coloring programs abound; which is why this is so refreshing.

Details: Disney Publishing Worldwide, www.DisneyDigitalBooks.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone (250 MB). Teaches/Purpose: creativity, art, coloring, color mixing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 11/27/2013. [WB]

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





Pan II: Chasing the Keeper

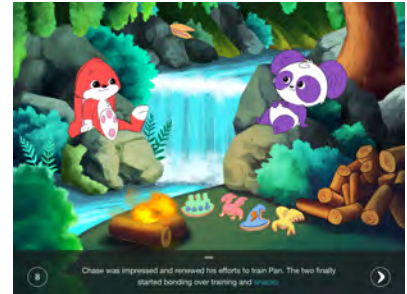
Richly illustrated, and set to a dramatic music backdrop, this 14 screen adventure contains plenty to explore. Because the text is narrated, it makes a good language experience. The interactive elements aren't flashy but the story holds together and some of the puzzles, such as one where you tilt the iPad screen to light up a triangle, are innovative.

It is the second interactive story app episode in the Pan adventures series. Pan (Pandora) is a purple panda that lives in the clouds. In this story, Pan meets the old and wise Keeper and trains with the warrior bunnies of Karakorum Keep. The text is highlighted and a scene selector makes it easy to jump around in the story. For free, not a bad app.

Details: Hullabalu, www.hullabalu.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 4-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 6.0 or higher) 133 MB. Teaches/Purpose: reading, some logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 11/13/2013. [WB]

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

84%



Peekaboo Sesame Street

This celebration of Sesame Street characters (including Elmo, Cookie Monster, Big Bird, Abby Cadabby, and Oscar the Grouch) looks good, but the design could be more responsive.

The app follows a simple peekaboo format. You see a Sesame Street view of a door and a few garbage cans and hear some knocking. To see who is there, you touch a door and get your surprise. We liked how the preview sounds gave children an audio hint about what is coming, however, there are some weaknesses to note. The screens are decorated with items that invite a touch, but don't do anything. The door knocking prompt repeats and gets annoying -- something more subtle and random would be more effective. It's also backwards -- you're supposed to knock on the door from the outside, not the inside. Game design by Brianne Baker and Nathan Tabor.

Details: Night & Day Studios, www.nightanddaystudios.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch . Teaches/Purpose: causality, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 11/13/2013. [WB]

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

76%





Pet Bingo

Math flashcards can take many forms, so why not a pet store Bingo game? Featuring good child tracking and progress reporting but limited design, Pet Bingo was created specifically to make math drill more interesting, by embedding the correct answers in a bingo board, where you can win goodies for your pets.

After you sign in, you get your own pet store, with four math operations displayed (+, -, x and ÷), each with three levels (easy, medium and hard). You then see a 5 x 5 Bingo board along with a math problem. If you don't know the answer, you can use a hint option, although the hints consist of a static slide and could do more to enhance the mathematics behind the numerals. The idea is to fill in the board, by answering the math problems as quickly as possible. Complete rows are rewarded with new pets and healthy pet snacks; and the pets accumulate and interact in your pet store.

The "do math or my pet goes hungry" idea is certainly motivating, and it keeps you on your toes answering math questions. But there's not much variety in the pet selection (they seem more similar than different), and while you can toggle on and off the music from the main menu, you can't control the pet sounds, which become repetitive and all sound the same. The visual hint system is a good in concept, but it's not dynamic, and it could do more to help children actively explore the concepts behind the equation. Finally, we wanted to be able to use multi-touch to select two identical bingo squares (that show the same answer) at the same time. None of these are deal breakers -- you still have a solid Math Bingo game that keeps records and offers a variety of math problems.

There's no shortage of Math Bingo apps (see, for example Math Bingo at <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/math-bingo/id371338715?mt=8>). This one could be better, but it will work for early elementary (K-4) age children.

Details: Duck Duck Moose, . Price: \$1.99. Ages: 5-9. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: math facts (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division). Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 10/30/2013. [WB]

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



Ranger Rick Jr. Appventures: Bears

Seven solid activities with hand drawn illustrations are enhanced with short videos and slides from Ranger Rick Jr. Magazine to help children explore the world of Grizzly bears.

This is the second in the Appventure series of apps -- the first was about Lions and the design is almost identical.

You do learn that Grizzly Bears can run fast (30 MPH!), eat things like clams, and take good care of their cubs. Games include Go Fish (tilt the iPad to help a hungry grizzly catch dinner); Where's the Bear? (the iPad becomes a camera on a virtual search for grizzlies); Match Sounds (a multiple-choice quiz that uses real animal sounds); and Solve a Puzzle (five bear photos are divided into 9, 16 or 25 shapes).

Application activities include Animal Builder (make wacky animals in this virtual "Mr. Potato Head" game); Animal Piano (press the piano keys to make music, using three animal sounds - the wolf was the best); and Sticker Board (a flannel-board like activity). The content, as measured by the amount of video and/or bear facts, is on the light side, but there's a variety of things to do. Created by Moonbot Studios for the National Wildlife Federation.

Details: National Wildlife Federation, www.rangerrickjr.org. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 4-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: biology, ecosystems. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 11/22/2013. [WB]

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





Rocks HD

This is a mashup of videos, photos and narrated blocks of text about US rocks and minerals. The design is mostly touch and hear, with quizzes.

Topics include the rock cycle, minerals, soil types, weathering and erosion, formation of fossils, and various types of fossils.

Details: Sprout Labs, www.sproutlabs.net. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: earth science, geology. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.1 stars. Entry date: 5/17/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	62%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	4	
Design Features	5	
Good Value	6	



Rube Works: The Official Rube Goldberg Invention Game

We've reviewed lots of Rube Goldberg-style games over the years, the most noteworthy being "The Incredible Machine" (1995, Sierra Online). This app, however, is the first to translate original Rube Goldberg sketches into the puzzles, and it's the first to do so on a touch screen.

Content includes 11 puzzle levels (more are planned, along with an Android version). Each puzzle can be unlocked. The first puzzle is very tricky, unless you follow the tutorial. If you stray beyond the instructions, you can get lost. Manipulating, placing and replacing items in the work area feels clumsy -- some items float while others drop; from a physics point of view, the ideas don't line up. You soon learn that realism isn't the point of this app. The best clues lie inside the zany humor of the Rube Goldberg illustrations (e.g., a Rooster crying over a bowl of chicken salad that used to be his wife; whose tears make a sponge heavy; which pulls on a string; which opens a valve, and so on). A better strategy would be to start with a very simple first puzzle.

Once you get into the humor, this app can be fun, especially for those who appreciate the original Rube Goldberg cartoons. Most mere mortals will need some hand holding, however.

Details: Electric Eggplant, . Price: \$2.99. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone (90 MB). Teaches/Purpose: logic, deductive reasoning. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 11/6/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	5	76%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	9	



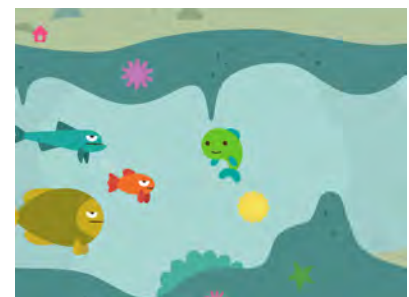
Sago Mini Ocean Swimmer

Like "Forest Flyer" (CTR June 2013), where you fly a bird around with your finger, Ocean Swimmer uses the same game mechanic using a little fish, with more art, characters and animation. There's no place you can't visit, and no way to fail. The only noticeable difference is that there's more to do, and the animated routines and music have been improved. There's a chorus of swimming fish, a treasure chest and a stunt-diving dog -- the sort of gentle surprises that a toddler will want to discover over and over again.

We liked how there's just enough tension to keep things interesting. This is a fish that likes to take risks. As a result, it makes an outstanding first app for the youngest child, offering a potentially collaborative, fine motor experience. You start by touching the front door of a fish house, and a little green fish appears which rings a bell. There's no formal educational content, but that's not the point. It's best to think of this app as a busy box that promotes exploration, feelings of control, and discovery; and hopefully some conversation. This "mini" app was by Sago Sago, the studio formally known as zinc Roe that was acquired by Toca Boca.

Details: Sago Sago, www.sagosago.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-4. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, language, causality. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 12/4/2013. [WB]

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





Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 Kids

With the bright orange and yellow case, the Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 Kids (\$200) is easy to pick out of the crowd. It also stands at the head of the pack of current 7 inch tablets when it comes some key factors, namely ease of use and parental features and app selection, making it our leading choice for a non-Apple device for children for 2013.

This tablet offers access to just about everything Google - Google Mobile Services, Google Search, Gmail, Google Plus, YouTube, Google Talk, Google Maps. The most interesting feature many be the combination of access to both the Google Play Store and a new store called Samsung Apps / Kid's Store. We liked the choice of apps. Just remember that Apple still has a 10:1 advantage in app numbers.

At it's core, this tablet is a modified mainstream Galaxy Tab 3, with a 1.2 GHz, Android 4.1 tablet with 8 GB of internal memory plus a micro SD slot, WiFi, Bluetooth, and a USB port. There are both front and rear cameras (rear is 3-megapixel, front 1.3 megapixel).

Apps: We counted 28 preloaded apps, which include Toca Train and Hair Salon 2, and several video selections.

The Application Manager includes a timer and the ability to choose which apps your child can see. When the designated use time is up, a password protected lock screen appears, requiring a parent or adult to enter the password to unlock the device.

The person overseeing the tablet is JK Shin, CEO and Head of IT & Mobile Communication at Samsung Electronics. The tablet was announced globally on August 27, 2013.

Details: Samsung, www.samsung.com. Price: \$200. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: an Android tablet for kids. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 8/29/2013. [WB]

Santa's Christmas Sleigh for Toddlers

This is a simple musical busy box type of experience with five screens of animated pop-up objects, all related to Christmas. As you explore, you listen to a looping version of Jingle Bells. This app is hardly state of the art -- some of the interesting items don't do anything and seem out of sync with the theme (e.g., a baby is crying on one of the cars of Santa's sleigh). However, there's enough to explore to keep things interesting, and there's no commercial content. More information at <http://www.santassleighapp.com>. See the preview at <http://youtu.be/sBpss4XOK6U>.

Details: Yomio Apps, www.santassleighapp.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: causality, Christmas. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 12/4/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	9
App Selection	9
Durability and Safety	9
Design Features	9
Good Value	9

90%



Ease of Use	10
Educational	N
Entertaining	8
Design Features	5
Good Value	8

78%





Santa's Suit is Missing!

A nicely illustrated and easy to read story with some interactive elements that include letting you choose which shoes, jacket and hat Santa wears. There are no wrong answers and it is possible to dress Santa in some very silly ways.

In the story you are the main character. Santa's Suit is missing, and your mission from Santa is to find a new suit and help save Christmas. You can read the story as a girl or boy, and add your own elf name. There's little or no text scaffolding, and few interactive elements. Written and illustrated by Brigid K. Shannon and narrated by schoolteacher Muriel Johnson. This is a clean app, with no ads, external links, or in-app purchases.

Details: Ginger Whale Interactive Stories, <http://gingerwhale.com/>. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-5. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, some memory, Christmas. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 11/20/2013. [WB]

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



Splash Math Kindergarten

A well designed, highly structured math drill serves up sets of basic math problems that start with counting and move into addition, subtraction and other math concepts and are aligned to common core standards.

There are eight lessons. After you finish a set of ten, you earn animals or plants that you can use to populate your planet, which is a nice touch. We've seen this formula tried many times before, but rarely so well. Nice touches include nice progress tracking so a child can self monitor, and what appears to be a nice leveling scheme.

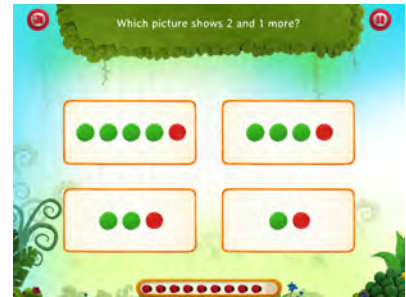
Topics covered include: Numbers – 0 to 20; represent numbers; Counting - count up to 20, counting forward, counting with objects and numbers; Comparisons – compare numbers and groups; Addition Concepts – Add with/without pictures, addition word problems, make a ten; Subtraction – Subtract with/without pictures, subtraction word problems, subtraction sentence; Geometry – identify 2D/3D shapes and figures, positional words; and Measurement – classify by color, size or object; length, width, weight, capacity.

The app also lets you turn on/off chapters to practice specific math skills and tailor sessions to your child's level. You can also set goals such as 10 questions a day or 10 minutes a day, and schedule reminders so your child doesn't miss a practice session. Other features include: monitor your child's progress; multi-player support; and weekly email reports.

Note that this app gives you month for free, but charges you \$10/month to continue using the program. If your child is making progress, their scores will be held hostage until you pay up.

Details: Studypad, Inc., <http://studypadinc.com>. Price: \$free/\$9.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: math facts, counting, basic facts. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 4/26/2013. [WB]

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





Strangebeard: The Pirate Princess

Fun and fast paced, this 36 page ebook adventure contains 3D page turns and nine responsive pirate-themed games that magically unfold out of the pages, just like past StoryToys apps.

The narrative, by StoryToy's Jim Pipe, is about Isabelle the pirate, who sails, dances, shoots and digs her way through a series of challenges. You help by completing nine arcade-style challenges that vary in difficulty. Some are quiet challenging. There's a boat steering game where you move vertically to avoid horizontally moving obstacles (too frustrating) and a clever dancing game where you must copy a model, using multi-touch inputs. Completing all challenges earns badges. The entire experience is very responsive and easy to play, and there's a nice variety of things to do. Because the text is narrated, there is some language value. You can toggle between English, French, German and Spanish and there are Read to Me, Read it Myself, and Autoplay modes.

Details: StoryToys, www.storytoys.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android, Kindle. Teaches/Purpose: playful, fine motor, language experience. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 11/14/2013. [WB]

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





Tabeo e2

Tabeo e2 (\$150, www.tabeo.com) over promises and under performs, and sadly does not improve upon 2012's poorly rated model. Compared to other tablets in the sub-\$200 price range, it has dropped close to the bottom of the rankings, due to limited features, limited app selection, clunky parental controls and average technical features.

The hardware base is made for Toys R Us by Arnova (www.arnovatech.com) and offers no more surprises than most other 7 inch tablets; such as a Micro SD expansion slot, 2 cameras, HDMI out and 8 GB of RAM. The screen and sound are OK. There is no physical home button, and the inset volume rocker is hard to use (and find) through the slot on the lime-green snap-on protective bumper.

Let's put the worst first. The parental features are provided by the French-made Edition Profil's Parental Filture, which was designed for computer-based browsers and not 7 inch tablets. But your tablet can't be used until you register for "safety reasons." This strong-armed registration requirement is rude, clunky, and can't be skipped; and the "protection" is limited to browser content only; ironically, the most worrisome content comes pre-installed and provided by Toys R Us, in the form of haphazard app section; many with in-app sales, banner ads and links to external sites or social media. The My Little Pony app (by Rovéo) teases children with "bits" that cost real dollars, and provide direct links to Facebook. It's worth noting that none of the apps are actually pre-installed, as the marketing materials imply. After you agree to a global terms of use agreement (that says you're 18) you download all the app introductions in a single download; a process that populates the screen with icons; but not the entire app. So a child wanting to play Need for Speed Most Wanted will touch the icon and then need to wait 10 minutes for the app to download. Of the 46 apps, many contain the brands of physical toys (Crayola and Hasbro are well represented); to the extent that Tabeo might be accurately classified as an interactive extension of a toy catalog. The most questionable app is the WWE Active (World Wrestling Entertainment) app that will populate your child's screen with a very non-wholesome twitter stream generated by big time wrestling fans; with links to videos. Of course you can choose to take these apps off, but this requires a proactive parent with the time to screen the apps.

Other apps include Bejeweled 2, Playrific (which curates videos and web-based games), The Game of Life, My Little Pony, Temple Run 2, Fruit Ninja, the poorly designed Little Pim ebooks from iStoryBooks, Operation Math, Crayola DigiTools Effects, Cartoon Network videos, Paper Camera and Kidobi. The Toys "R" Us App Guide for Differently-Abled Kids is a noble effort, but it's nothing more than a PDF that crashes on the fourth page. Gender bias and marketing are in the DNA of Tabeo. If you choose "girl" you get a pink desktop; while boys get a blue Racecar. My Little Pony, created for Hasbro by GameLoft has in-app sales, and gives children access to social networks.

What if you want other apps? Not possible on this tablet, other than the Toys R Us app store (designed by a company named "Spoiled Milk Limited") which comes with a built-in allowance system that lets you pre-load your child's account. Toys R Us clearly wants (and needs) to be a player in the digital content business and is trying to use this tablet as the Trojan Horse -- a way to get an app/music/book/movie store into your child's playroom. But with the limited app selection and such a poorly designed interface, this horse won't go very far.

Details: Toys R Us, www.toysrus.com. Price: \$150. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: an Android tablet designed for children. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 1.8 stars. Entry date: 9/9/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	5	36%
App Selection	3	
Durability and Safety	6	
Design Features	2	
Good Value	2	





Tearaway

From the creators of LittleBigPlanet, comes an innovative PlayStation Vita game that is available only as a download.

It is described as a "buddy-movie" style handheld adventure that takes you through a world made out of paper. There are printable papercraft projects, and the ability to share in-game photos, using the Vita camera. As you explore, you tilt the screen and use the back touch screen quite frequently.

You can access your papercraft creations through the Tearaway community site (<http://tearaway.me>). If you login with your PSN ID, you can sync your copy of the game and share your projects. The game was designed by Rex Crowle of Media Molecule; the trailer is at <http://tearaway.mediamolecule.com>. Our testers noted that "the controls feel flexible and the use of touchpad is amazing. Tearaway also has PS Vita's motion sensing, much like the Wii U Gamepad, and makes it feel like you're holding a magic camera. The final verdict -- this awesome game has left me speechless."

Details: Media Molecule Ltd., www.mediamolecule.com. Price: . Ages: 8-up. Platform: PS Vita*. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, spatial realtions. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 12/2/2013. [WB]

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



TinyTap

TinyTap is a tool for self publishing, best suited for touch-and-hear types of experiences. There's also a community component, with the ability to download and, in some cases, purchase, content from other TinyTap users.

You start by adding elements, by way of a photo or a sketch. Next, you can record sounds. Using tracing tools, you can define the areas on the screen where the voice will be active.

Features include the ability to add your own images or use sticker packs, sold as in-app purchases. There are three types of activities: reading, questions and a sound board, and it is possible to track a child's progress by way of a in-game scoring system. The navigation is hard to figure out, and the general concept could be better explained for first time users. The bottom line: TinyTap is good for making mediocre ebooks quickly.

Details: TinyTap Ltd., www.tinytap.it. Price: \$free. Ages: 12-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (Requires iOS 5.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: a creativity tool for making ebooks. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.2 stars. Entry date: 10/24/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	6	63%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	7	

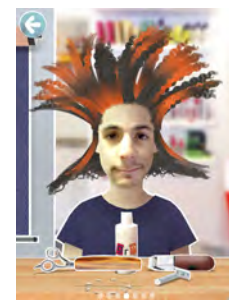


Toca Hair Salon Me

The third edition of Toca Hair Salon lets you import your own photos, and morph them onto the animated faces of your haircut customer; complete with blinks, yawns and stretches. When you combine this new feature with all the easy to use Toca Hair tools, you have one of the best creativity apps of the year. Tools include a razor, curling iron, crimper and straightener; plus there's a set of ties, ribbons, hats and glasses. Each can be resized or easily swapped out for another look. Weaknesses are hard to find -- teachers might like an ability to control the background music; and this is the type of app that can fill up a photo gallery with images; a feature that might be nice to manage as well. Note that you'll need to grant the app permission to use the camera and to store photos. Warning -- once you get started, it is hard to stop. It's always nice to see a great app get better; such is the case with Toca Hair Salon Me.

Details: Toca Boca, <http://tocaboca.com/>. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, photography, visual arts. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 11/24/2013. [WB]

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





Toca Mini

Children can playfully explore some powerful graphic design concepts with this 3D figurine decorating experience. You start with a blank slate, in the form of a pudgy figure and a set of 78 reversible stamps, creative zany options such as spider webs, wheels, hearts and shoe laces, and stamps to create your own hair and eyes, and a palate of colors.


You learn that the more features you add, the more your figure "wakes up" and comes to life.

While the strength of this app is that it is so simple to pick up and play, there are some drawbacks to note. Sometimes you can't remove a stamp, and the stamps don't always drag the way you'd like. This isn't a big deal, but it is annoying -- in the accompanying video review you can see how you need to pause over an icon to "make it stick" to your finger. At the end, you can take a photo, but you can't save or edit your prior work.

What sets this app apart from others is the way it lets you draw on a 3D object, and the smart features, such as the emerging personality. For example, if you leave a Mini alone for too long it will try to catch your attention by waving or singing and dancing. While this program looks simple, it's actually a template that can lead to some powerful ideas.

Details: Toca Boca, <http://tocaboca.com/>. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, 3D perspective. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 10/22/2013. [WB]

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




Touch, Look, Listen: My First Words


Featuring clear illustrations and multiple language options, this "visual dictionary" looks and acts like the previous StoryToys apps, with 3D popup pages that magically unfold. Unlike the others, this app has a specific function, however -- to allow the exploration of 100 common words in English, French, German, Spanish and Chinese.

The pedagogy works -- it helps you explore new words while reinforcing those you already know. There is also a second language option to explore French, German, Spanish and Chinese.

The items are grouped into 14 categories, and you can choose to have English, French, German, Spanish and Chinese as either primary or secondary language. Other nice touches include clear images and professional narration. You can also toggle on/off the background music, which is good for classrooms. See also Farm 123. All in all, this is an excellent app.

Details: Storytoys, www.storytoys.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-4. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: vocabulary, reading, ESL, German, French, Spanish, Chinese. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 12/6/2013. [WB]

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




Wubbzy's Dance Party


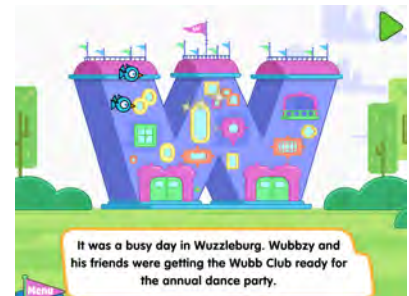
Based on "Meet the Wuzzles," this responsive, well-designed app lets your child play along with Wubbzy and pals, Daizy, Walden and Widget.

In the story, The Wubb Club is planning a dance party, but someone must take over as lead singer when Wubbzy has too much lemon juice.

Content includes 20 pages with text highlighting and lots of responsive hot spots, four mini-games that highlight shapes, colors and counting and two videos. There's a Read to Me and a grown-up's corner with controls over sounds. Created by Cupcake Digital. See also Wubbzy's Magic School, with similar design.

Details: Cupcake Digital, Inc., www.cupcakedigital.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (70 MB). Teaches/Purpose: reading, reading comprehension, school readiness skills, matching, counting, shapes. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 4/24/2013. [WB]

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



Wubbzy's Magic School

Based on "Meet the Wuzzles," this responsive, well-designed app lets your child play along with Wubbzy and pals, Daizy, Walden and Widget.

In the story, when Wubbzy and his friends spend a day at Moo Moo the Magician's Castle, they learn that magic really does happen when you believe in yourself and try your hardest. The text is highlighted, and you can touch individual words to hear them read aloud. There are three reading modes - Read & Play, Read to Me, and Just a Book. The mini-games cover counting, number and shape recognition, sight word recognition, memory and letter identification. All in all, this is a solid app. See also Wubbzy's Dance Party for a similar design.

Details: Cupcake Digital, Inc., www.cupcakedigital.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (70 MB). Teaches/Purpose: memory, reading, language experience, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 4/25/2013. [WB]

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



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 and Google Play access. 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): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 2/10/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	86%
App Selection	9	
Durability and Safety	8	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	





Future Releases & Updates

DECEMBER, 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.

Agent P: DoofenDASH

This endless runner is set in Disney's Phineas and Ferb universe, for iOS and Android phones and tablets.

The game is set on the rooftops of Danville to provide an authentic Phineas and Ferb experience. You run, jump, roll and dodge to avoid Dr. Doofenshmirtz's traps. Content includes gadgets, power-ups, characters, and costumes that are available to unlock. Available for iOS and Android devices on the App Store, Google Play and Amazon Appstore for Android. The app is free with in-app purchases available.

Details: Majesco Entertainment, www.majescoentertainment.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 6-11. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: . Entry date: 11/14/2013.



Barbie Digital Makeover Mirror

Transform an iPad or iPad mini into a digital mirror by sliding it in this Barbie Digital Makeover Mirror.

The app is well designed, and works without the toy; however, the toy unlocks additional features. After you download the free app, install three AA batteries in the base, and turn on the Bluetooth settings on your iPad, you are ready to start. You see your face in the "mirror," and can select options like eye shadow, lipstick, color, and glitter. The iPad camera does all the work, finding your face and making sure your eyes are lined up with the digital effects. You can save your work. Requires 3 AA batteries. Made for iPad (4th generation), iPad (3rd generation), iPad 2, and the iPad mini. See the video preview at <http://youtu.be/v8UGBNPFKDA>

Details: Mattel, Inc., www.mattel.com. Price: \$70. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: creativity. Entry date: 4/10/2013.

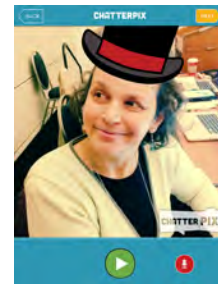


ChatterPix

See also ChatterPix Kids.

This is a version of ChatterPix with social features like Facebook and email. with social features like Facebook and email. Free, fun and easy to use, this creativity experience gets children talking; by leveraging the power of your iPad's camera and microphone. See also ChatterPix Kids.

Details: Duck Duck Moose, . Price: \$free. Ages: 9-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, language. Entry date: 11/23/2013.





DreamWorks Dragons Adventure

Built for the Nokia Lumia 2520 running Windows RT 8.1, this GPS game turns a car ride into an interactive journey, letting you assume the role of a dragon trainer in the magical Isle of Berk. But you're not actually on the island. You're in your car, viewing the real world as if you were inside the "How to Train Your Dragon" world. We have not actually tested this product; we heard about it from Rebecah Levi, a KAPi Juror.

Called "DreamWorks Dragons Adventure" the app incorporates a companion mode that allows other players to participate by using their Nokia Lumia Windows 8 smartphone to create missions, change the action and add new challenges. We're not sure how the app is monetized, or if it is any fun.

Players begin in the At-Home Quest mode, where they pick a dragon. Next you go to the Driving Quest mode, where you travel around, in search of "loot" hidden (overlaid) onto the real world environment. If you do well, you can hatch dragons and earn achievements. The goal is to become a Dragon Master. Parents can be a part of the adventure too. Before beginning a Driving Quest, parents use the Dragons Adventure Companion app to create a mission on their Nokia Lumia smartphone, then tap to deliver it to the player's Lumia 2520. They can change what happens during a Quest by adding new challenges or stop the game if their child gets too rowdy. Created for Nokia by Dreamworks. More info at <http://www.zebrapartners.net/>.

Details: Nokia, . Price: \$free. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Windows RT 8.1 running on a Nokia Lumina. Teaches/Purpose: augmented reality, spatial realtions. Entry date: 12/3/2013.



Hopscotch - Activities for Kids

Featuring content from Highlights magazine that consists of articles, stories and crafts, this free app also features interactive content including comics, videos, and classic games such Hidden Picture puzzles. Children can earn coins by interacting with the app, which they can then use to buy items to decorate their room.

Content includes: one Highlights and one High Five digital magazine; one recipe; two stories; 21 videos; one interactive Hidden Pictures game; one The Timbertoes comic; and one Mossegood & Boks comic (exclusive to Hopscotch). Additional content, including additional digital Highlights magazines, recipes, crafts, story bundles, videos, games and comics, is available for in-app purchase, with prices of \$.99 & up.

Details: Highlights for Children, Inc., www.highlights.com. Price: \$free with in-app purchases. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, memory, logic. Entry date: 8/8/2013.



iPin Laser

iPin Laser is a tiny 3.5 mm headphone plug sized laser that you keep in your iPhone or iPad's audio jack, just in case you want to use your device as a laser pointer. It is a clever idea, but it has some practical challenges. First, it requires downloading, installing and starting a free app (called iPin Pad). It also creates a problem if you want to use ear plugs; and if you have the laser in and get a phone call, your phone might think you have ear buds plugged in, so you won't be able to hear the call. To fix this problem, you can turn the iPin Laser so that the contacts aren't touching the audio contacts. But this requires that you remember to take this extra step. You'll probably end up taking the iPin laser out and putting in in your pocket, where it could get lost. Finally, consider that a regular laser pointer costs about \$10; a lot less than the \$50 price.

Should you buy one? For geek showdowns, perhaps; for real world use, not really. Learn more at <http://ipinlaser.com/ipin/>

Details: Canary Enterprise, www.ipinlaser.com/ipin. Price: \$50. Ages: NA. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: a teaching utility. Entry date: 11/1/2013.





Jokes School

A good idea meets a clunky design, with this app designed to teach children how to speak confidently and with expression in public, while making children laugh in the process.

Features include: appisodes on how to tell a joke (or a funny story); 20 age-appropriate fully animated jokes by four characters; create your own live performance on stage by taking your photo, choosing a character, and recording your voice; and share your personalized videos with family and friends (after unlocking the parents lock) or stored in the library.

Details: enabling genius, www.enablingGenius.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: public speaking, jokes. Entry date: 11/11/2013.



Just Dance Kids 2014

The follow-up to Just Dance Kids 2 (CTR February 2012), this edition contains 30 new songs from children's pop stars, TV shows and movies. These include Hit the Lights by Selena Gomez and One Thing by One Direction.

Features include: coop duets with complementary choreography featuring unique parts for each player; four player co-op play in multiplayer mode; non-stop shuffle; fitness tracker; and custom playlists.

Exclusive to the Kinect: a Just Create mode lets kids take the lead in their own music video, create dance routines and challenge friends. Exclusive to the Wii U - Dance Director mode lets one player act as the leader and use the Wii GamePad to send the other players dance suggestions in the middle of songs, then show off their moves and be awarded points by the Dance Director. While Just Dance Kids 2014 isn't terrible, it's not as good as Just Dance 2014.

Details: Ubisoft, Inc., www.ubisoft.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 4-up. Platform: Wii, Wii U, Xbox 360. Teaches/Purpose: gross motor movement, lower body coordination, dancing. Entry date: 10/21/2013.



Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 ReMIX

Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 ReMIX is a compilation of Kingdom Hearts Final Mix (previously exclusive to the Japanese market), and Kingdom Hearts Re:Chain of Memories; all redone for newer HD monitors. The two-in-one disc package also features HD cinematic videos from Kingdom Hearts 358/s Days, enhanced gameplay mechanics and PS system trophies. Players can now relive the origins of the franchise with Sora, Riku and a cast of Disney characters including Mickey, Donald and Goofy.

Features include: revamped camera controls and commands; worlds including Agrabah (Aladdin), Atlantica (The Little Mermaid), Halloween Town (The Nightmare Before Christmas), Mostro (Pinocchio), Never Land (Peter Pan), Olympus Coliseum (Hercules), 100 Acre Wood (Winnie the Pooh), and Wonderland (Alice in Wonderland); new weapons, items, Heartless enemies, abilities, synthesis recipes and Gummi ship missions; and an all-star voice cast that includes Haley Joel Osment (Sora), Hayden Panettiere (Kairi), David Gallagher (Riku), Mandy Moore (Aerith) and Jesse McCarthy (Roxas).

Corey says: "Final Mix is an HD remake of the PS2 version (2002). The game itself has a wonderful story. Gameplay consists of combat and magic as it is much like a third person platformer. It controls pretty well but the camera control is confusing. The story, however, will make you want to keep playing till the very end. Chain of Memories is a card based battle game similar to Pokemon but having gameplay similar to Kingdom Hearts games. The graphics now have a crisp HD look. In the story, Sora, Donald and Goofy are trapped in Castle Oblivion with rules based on cards, voiding their magic powers. Gameplay consists of using cards to use tools. Even getting from map to map requires the correct card. Sora's friends such as Donald and Goofy can be summoned for help, but Donald and Goofy are trapped in cards. This game is fun, with a good story with great characters, although it's not as extensive as Final Mix. This HD remake is worth the buy."

Details: Square Enix, Inc., www.square-enix.com/na/. Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: PlayStation 3. Teaches/Purpose: logic, memory. Entry date: 8/29/2013.





Kurio Touch 4S

As of Fall 2013, Kurio comes in three sizes -- 4 inch (\$100), 7 inch (\$150) and 10 inch (\$200). The 4S is the smallest, cheapest, and hardest to use of the Kurio family of tablets. It has a Micro SD card, headphone jack, HDMI port, front/back cameras and 8 GB of storage.

The 36 pre-installed apps are low to mid quality, including free demo versions. Noteworthy apps include Talking Ginger, Monster House, and Booksy. Apps come from SlideMe Market, iMobile Market, Amazon App Store, Kurio Market, and Booksy.

Testers said: horrible sound, medium screen quality, bad controls, week batteries, and limited access to mainstream apps.

Details: KD Interactive, www.kurioworld.com/us/. Price: \$100. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: A 4 inch Android Tablet for children. Entry date: 12/11/2013.



My Geometric Universe

Use a virtual pencil, ruler, compass and set square to draw geometric shapes. Content includes six 2D shapes, and 30 3D objects. The shapes can be placed in three worlds: The Kid's room, Ancient Egypt or the Middle Ages.

Available in 11 languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, Japanese, Chinese, Turkish and Russian. There are lot of steps to the problems, and some of the instructions are hard to figure out. Also, the ruler can be hard to position.

Details: Chocolapps, www.chocolapps.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 6.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: math, shapes, geometry. Entry date: 11/14/2013.



myON Reader

myON (www.myON.com), a business unit of Capstone, was launched May 2011 as a subscription-based digital publishing platform to serve school districts. Content is provided by 36 publishers, with titles for each subject area, genre, and reading level. Books are stored in the cloud, and accessed by a password.

Content is provided by Disney, Capstone Press, Compass Point Books, Heinemann-Raintree, Picture Window Books, and Stone Arch Books. All publishers' titles include reading supports and are leveled using The Lexile Framework for Reading. The supports include an embedded dictionary, highlighting and naturally recorded audio. It is delivered on laptops, desktops, tablets, and mobile devices for an online or offline reading experience.

Details: Capstone Publishing, www.capstonepub.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 5-12. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: reading, reading comprehension. Entry date: 11/19/2013.





Newborn-to-Toddler Apptivity Seat for iPad Device

iPads for Newborns? Uh oh. Fisher-Price now has two specific apps for this age range, and a specialized fabric bouncy seat to house them.

How it works: Newborn-to-Toddler Apptivity Seat for iPad Device is a sturdy \$80 fabric bouncy seat from Fisher-Price that has the option of attaching an iPad holder, so the screen sits about 10 inches from the baby's face. The holder is fairly large and can tilt. Because it is suspended over the child's face, part of the view is blocked. If you're not using the iPad, you can unsnap the holder completely, resulting in a low tech, completely non-controversial fabric seat.

To use your iPad, you start one of the special free Fisher-Price apps and snap your iPad into place. These apps have motion activation features, and images designed to be fascinating for a baby to watch. There are timers, and you can toggle between black/white and color, and you can easily adjust the screen brightness and volume.

The seat can be adjusted (three different angles, for each age) and the bar that holds the iPad also holds two dangling activity toys that can be removed, and are within reach. When the activity toys are pulled, they shake the iPad, resulting in motion that can be picked up by the iPad. Kicks or wriggles will also make things happen; and a child can jab or kick at the screen to make things happen. If the iPad is not in place, the holder doubles as a mirror. Fisher-Price says that the apps "stimulate and engage" your baby while "protecting your device from sticky fingers."

We found two free apps in iTunes created especially for use with this product and tested both, but neither with real babies. We recorded a child's-eye view of one of the apps: Soothing Sights and Sounds (with mellow sounds and nature scenes that change if motion is detected). The black-and-white, high contrast patterns can "help develop eye-tracking skills." The apps are free, you can download them and see for yourself what they do without owning the seat.

THE CONTROVERSY. This device has created a loud protest from many parents who say "laps not apps." When you look at the arguments pro and con, we find both sides are guilty of stretching the research.

The most vocal opposition comes from the Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood (CCFC) who says "screen time for children under two is linked to language delays, sleep disturbance, and learning problems later in childhood. Studies also suggest that time with screens takes babies away from activities proven to be beneficial to brain development—hands-on creative play and positive interactions with caring adults." To that we say, "references please", because most research has been done on non-interactive screens (e.g., TV) which may be very different than the experiences here.

Fisher Price says that this toy "helps enhance babies' visual skills through sketches of animals in outdoor scenes." We'd like to see evidence of that, too. About all we can know for certain is that a vivid retinal display just 10 inches from baby's young face is new, un-researched, and obviously unsettling.

WHAT WE KNOW: A sensori-motor child learns about the world by touching, mouthing and manipulating; and social-emotional connections, or bonding, is on par with food and hygiene. So putting an unblinking screen where a parent's face would normally be removes a possible parent/child bonding time.

To better understand this issues surrounding this seat I asked Fisher-Price for one to test, and showed it to as many friends, technology and parent experts, as possible, while I fished for comments on twitter and the Dust or Magic facebook page after making my video. On Dust or Magic, the majority (16) of the 17 people who voted called the chair a "horrible" idea. The following are excerpts or quotes from people I interviewed.

- Once I watched the video and saw there were some interactive components to the apps, I could see that the entire contraption is more like a sophisticated rattle or busy box. But the Fisher-Price apps have a lot of non-interactive components, and I'm not sure the child will "get" the connection between their kick or pull, and the stuff on the screen. If not, this is bad idea.

- In most cases, for most uses it is harmless. But imagine walking into a day care where they have 10 or 20 of these things setup for naptime, and that "naptime" gets longer and longer because the children seem to be safe, quiet, and easy to handle? Uh oh. We already





Puppeteer

Turn your PS3 into a puppet theatre, with puppets that have swappable parts. If you lose your head, you can lose a life, however. A pair of magic scissors lets you cut and crop through this adventure. In the story, a young boy named Kutaro has been carried away by the maleficent Moon Bear King to a black castle and turned into a puppet. Kutaro displeased the tyrant, who then devoured the boy's wooden head and cast away his body. The headless hero discovers a special pair of scissors to help him on his adventure to find his head, and his way home. The game is set in a magical puppeteer's theater, with a constantly changing environment.

On 9/4/13, Corey said: Puppeteer is a PS3 exclusive that is a side-scrolling platformer with a puppet-show theme. The magic scissors let you cut fabric, eliminate enemies and free souls, and they are very fun to use. The music captivates the story's image and backdrop with classical themes that suggest 18th to early 19th century Central Europe. Graphics are highly acceptable for any PlayStation 3 game, and are compatible with 3D technology, one of the best 3D technologies. Puppeteer's graphics and theme are consistent with the elaborate and playful themes of puppet shows. This is an amazing design in puppetry.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, www.scea.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: PlayStation 3. Teaches/Purpose: logic, spatial thinking, creativity. Entry date: 8/29/2013.



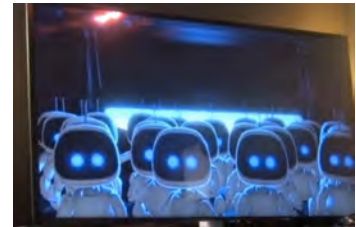
The Playroom for PlayStation 4

How'd you like to go inside a game controller? This innovative title comes from the same studio that made Sony's iPets game. This game, which comes installed on the PS4, is designed to help explore features of the new PlayStation Camera and the new controllers.

You start by swiping the touch pad on the controller, to flick small robots into the room -- because you see yourself in the screen, it appears as if they're in front of you. A vacuum cleaner mode lets you suck the robots back inside the controller, and you can feel them rumbling around thanks to the new dual haptic feature. The robots also dance along with a light show, or you can find another player to play a game of air hockey, using the touchpad.

The visual effects are amazing; not unlike "Tron" but there's not a lot of overall content. This is an excellent "lite" introduction to the new features of the PS4.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, www.scea.com. Price: . Ages: 3-up. Platform: PlayStation 4*. Teaches/Purpose: . Entry date: 11/19/2013.



Vinci MV

A child's phone meets a children's tablet with Vinci MV (\$150, www.vincigenius.com), the latest addition to the Vinci line of Android tablets. It comes with a 5 inch screen, and is designed to deliver both voice and data services over cell towers. Note that the cell service is not included in the \$150 price -- for that you need to contact your service provider. The tablet includes access to the educational content, which includes the Vinci Curriculum and the Vinci Kids Library (some apps are sold separately).

The device is powered by Android 4.1, a MTK 6577 processor that is WCDMA 3G enabled, and it has two SIM slots, plus Bluetooth, GPS, and Wi-Fi; all housed in a durable rubber exterior that looks like it could survive as a hockey puck, or bounce down a sidewalk without damage.

Other features include 0.3 MP Front / 5MP Back cameras, 4GB of RAM and an external MicroSD slot, for up to 32GB of storage. Software includes preloaded VINCI curriculum app samples, Kids Library app samples, 12 VINCI Music Video 12 titles (30 min). Included in the package: A leather case, travel charger, USB cable, and earphone with microphone.

Details: Rullingnet Corporation, <http://vincigenius.com>. Price: \$150. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: An Android tablet and phone for children. Entry date: 12/2/2013.

