

The 2014 BolognaRagazzi Digital Award Results and Commentary



It might have a funny name, but if your job has anything to do with children's books it's worth your time to examine the top 20 apps identified by the jurors of the BolognaRagazzi Digital Award.

The annual process starts with an examination of 258 entries from 176 publishers representing 37 countries, and each product was released within the past year. The jurors made a conscious effort to be blind to the size, platform and geographic origin of the publisher in an effort to consider each project on merit alone. So who won and why?

THE JURORS VALUED INNOVATION, AND "THINKING OUTSIDE THE PAGE." Once again, the jurors discovered many entries where the technology detracted from a story, cluttering the experience with animation. Other times, the product was no more than a digitization of a printed product, with some animations carelessly sprinkled on the page. In a few instances, however, the power of the technology was woven perfectly with quality illustration, narration and sounds, resulting in a magical experience that enhanced the narrative experience. The jurors were seeking innovation and interactive features that complimented and extended storytelling.

Choosing winners was challenging. Among the 258 entries were many strong titles that could have easily been on the short list. In the end, two winners, four mentions and 14 short list entries were selected.

Despite coming from separate continents, the winners shared a common attribute. They delivered a rich, engaging experience while not losing their connection to storytelling; with "old fashioned" quality in the writing and illustration. These were the winners of this year's digital prize.

Commentary from the Jurors

You can watch the jurors discuss the prize at <http://youtu.be/bAHkW4SYaFU>. Here are some edited comments, extracted from this year's observations by Warren Buckleitner (to see who said what, watch the video).

- It's nice to find subtle and simple techniques, such as in the app **Rules of Summer**, <http://youtu.be/fBTv58HuOw0> where you start with small detail of a large painting and push your way out. It was a rather unique way to get you thinking about the meaning of a picture.
- **Double Double** <http://youtu.be/meLaINKUUaM> is another example of a project that was extremely simple, but well suited for the touch screen. This type of work proves that you don't have to be a sophisticated interactive designer to make a quality digital product for an interactive screen. In other words, a noteworthy app doesn't need complexity.
- It is clear that lots of money has been spent on such things as voice overs or some sort of visual effects, but the work falls short due to low quality narration or poorly selected illustrations. The old fashioned elements still count.



- I expected more innovation this year (says Cristina) with more variety in the submissions. It seems like many publishers still target younger children.
- Innovation is still often viewed as a technical issue and not an editorial one. The two must go hand-in-hand.
- There were still a lot of cliché effects. Last year we called them page flippers.
- When you see a page metaphor mapped onto a multi-touch screen, it immediately says it's not very forward thinking.
- With regards to illustration on a screen, people sometimes assume you have to go to a flat digital look which is not the case. As illustrated by **Pierre et le loup**, it is possible to work with many types of media that can be very rich.
- Lots of apps that were just "yuck." They just weren't thought through. There's still a lot of careless work that

wouldn't make it past the editor of traditional printed work.

- The interactive features have to improve the overall quality of the experience. Often times, they just seem distracting.
- In the field of architecture, there is a saying that says "form follows function." That also can hold true for an interactive project, where the narrative serves as the function.
- If you test the work with kids, you pick up a lot of things that adults don't notice. For example, they don't like to wait for a screen to load.
- Thinking outside the box is always valued.
- It helps if the team knows each other's abilities, as well as what's going on in the overall space.

IF YOU WANT TO WIN NEXT YEAR

- Innovate. Do something someone hasn't already done. Use the cameras or the motion sensors in a new way; or come up with a new way to pull a child into the story.
- Find a new story. So many ideas seem recycled.
- Think about creating for older children, or a broader age range.
- Remember that quality illustrations, narration and craftsmanship will never go out of style.

In summary, remember that this is an Olympic competition, and you win or lose in the details. We're coming into an era where a creative person will start seeing a multi-touch tablet, and the affordances that it offers, as the natural way to tell a story. But, it is always important to use the appropriate technology or interactive feature appropriately.

2014 Winners and Mentions

Non-Fiction

WINNER - **Pierre et le loup** (Peter and the Wolf) by Camera Lucida (France) is a well crafted celebration of crisp music and graphics; raising the bar for mixing storytelling, information and musical play. This is an extraordinarily well-thought visual mix of motion media, animation, typography and graphic design that is full of surprising extras.



MENTION ABC Actions

by Peapod Labs (USA) Crystal clear images bring language action to life at a child's fingertips; we loved the multiple navigation paths and the ability to dynamically change between the two available languages English and Spanish.



MENTION **Double Double** by And Then Story Designers (USA). Simple drawings and basic animation with elegant, funny and intelligent results, based on a simple idea.

Fiction

WINNER **Love, The App** by Niño Studio (Argentina). It was easy to love this app - tremendous digital imagination and inventiveness applied to a book which celebrates the textures and trickery of paper, giving life to the vulnerability of the story.



MENTION **Midnight Feast**, Slap Happy Larry (Australia). Evocative, sinister and strange (fortunately you can turn down the scariness level for younger readers) this is a story to linger over and take into your dreams, full of surprising changing perspectives.



MENTION **Jack and the Beanstalk** by Nosy Crow (UK). Jack's magic beans sprouted a magical app, full of innovative interactive design elements that stretch the medium. Hunt for the Golden Goose, outrun the giant, and mend a broken mirror image of yourself.



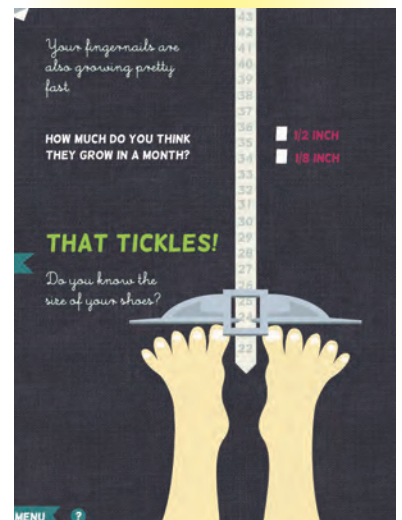
Shortlist (Top 20 for 2014)

Here are the top 20, including winners and mentions, in alphabetical order. Note that comments are CTR's and do not reflect the opinions of the jurors.

1. **1000 Adventures** by Dada Company (Spain) employs a creative “touch countdown” meter on each page, which increased engagement and helps children know when it’s time to move to the next screen.
2. **Amico Ragnolo** by SmallBytes Digital (USA) is a Spanish language book with excellent illustrations, although the responsiveness could be improved.
3. **Byron Barton** by Oceanhouse Media (USA) combines clean graphics with Oceanhouse Media’s fantastic text scaffolding.
4. **Disney Animated** by Touch Press (UK) is one of the most breathtaking non-fiction apps of all time. Download this app, if you have room.
5. **Double Double** by And Then Story Designers (USA) shows how to use a multi-touch screen to present a simple idea, in a surprising way.
6. **Droles Animaux** by Goodbye Paper (France) is a wonderfully illustrated, zany app with enough interactivity to bring an element of surprise to the letters.
7. **Easy Studio** by 3 Elles Interactive (France) turns a child into the animator by way of a well-designed set of tutorials and animation tools.
8. **Facciamo** (Let’s Face It) by Topipittori Isotype.org Semidigitali (Italy) is a delightful collection of interactive forms that can be mixed and matched to make numerals, faces and relationships. Take note of the way the unveil technique is used to uncover hidden images.
9. **Fun With Colors The Discovery App** by Bastei Lübbe AG (Germany) brings the primary colors to life by way of refreshingly unique illustrations. Noteworthy feature: The “color snake” feature that chases your finger, as you scribble.
10. **Gekke Dieren** by Querido Children’s Books (Netherlands) lets you mix and match animal parts, and record a sound. The illustrations are particularly strong, and manage to go together, despite coming from very different types of animals.
11. **I Love My Dad** by SnappyAnt Play Limited (Australia) combines delightful illustrations and a meaningful story; though limited interactive design.
12. **This Is My Body** by Urbn: Pockets (Germany) mixes interesting facts with non-page, non-linear, up/down, left/right tab-based navigation format. Noteworthy feature: the bookmarks that signal a different navigation path; and the interactive growth scales, where you get to stretch your foot.
13. **Jack and the Beanstalk** by Nosy Crow (UK) is yet another outstanding fairy tale from Nosy Crow. Noteworthy feature; the interactive mirror puzzle.
14. **Love - The App** by Niño Studio (Argentina) combines a strong story with compelling illustrations. The story has a surprising twist as it reveals itself to you.
15. **Midnight Feast** by Slap Happy Larry (Australia) reminds us all that touch screen storytelling isn’t exclusive to the very young.
16. **Petting Zoo** by Fox & Sheep GmbH (Germany) is a textbook example of interactive animation; with visual surprises that morph from screen to screen, challenging the definition of page.
17. **Pierre et le Loup** (Peter and the Wolf) by Camera Lucida (France) puts visual and auditory quality of the highest calibre at a child’s fingertips. In this case, it’s a symphony orchestra. Noteworthy feature: The augmented reality exploration of the orchestra.
18. **Red in Bed** by Josh On (USA) is a playful exploration of the primary colors, and the role they play in what a child sees.
19. **Rules of Summer** by We Are Wheelbarrow (Australia) is a huge download, for not a lot of content. But the idea of pinching and pulling out of a picture is unique, landing this app on the finalist list.
20. **Sneak a Snack** by Mario Brodeur/U.n.I Interactive (Canada) is comprised of 3D pages that can be moved or swiped, your choice.



Above: The bold illustrations of **Facciamo!** (Italy) scored points with the jurors; and the innovative navigation combined with the ability to stretch your feet to match your age, moved **This is my Body** (Germany) to the short list.



Dust or Magic

Want to learn how to expertly weave narration into digital magic?

Don't miss two Dust or Magic children's publishing related events:

- Dust or Magic **Masterclass**, at the Bologna Children's Book Fair on March 23, 2014
- Dust or Magic **eBook Retreat**, at Boyds Mills, PA on April 27 - 29, 2014