# Children's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

BOLOGNA RAGAZZI DIGITAL AWARD 2014

BOLOGNA CHILDREN'S BOOK FAIR

## IN THIS ISSUE

On the cover: **Pierre et le Loup** (Peter and the Wolf)

* Donotes an "Editor's Choice."

Children's Technology Review EDITOR'S CHOICE 2014 FOR EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN

<br>

*"When you turn 4, you will have doubled in size from when you were born, and will be about 4 times as heavy. You are not fully grown until you turn 20." From This is My Body - Anatomy for Kids.*

*"We discovered 20 ebooks that everyone should look at; although, compared to last year, there was less innovation." Page 4, Report from the Jurors.*



### Lessons on Design from an Early Childhood Expert

Last weekend, I received a crash course from an expert on early childhood development: Max, aged 2 1/2 years. Max has his own iPad (that he permits his mother to use) and was thrilled to discover one of the apps on his iPad was also on mine — **Sago Mini Pet Café**. He put both iPads side-by side and gave himself a double dose of all the problems the app could generate. It created a tablet mediated adult/child interaction (sometimes called "parallel play"). I captured some of the interaction on camera (http://youtu.be/p3ZYwx-2Eq8). Next, after he cured every animal in **Toca Pet Doctor**, Max helped me test a new app for this issue called **Busy Shapes** (http://youtu.be/JDTmbHYvVYk). There's a point in the video where the app intervenes at exactly the right time, to keep Max engaged. Here's what Max taught me:

1. Both activities were highly engaging. But, neither had instructions, praise, or sugary voices, despite being structured and didactic.
2. Both activities give Max room to test the limits of the experience, so that failure can be part of the learning. He fails a lot and (I'd argue) he learns a lot.
3. The best apps present a clear challenge and get out of the way. Max illustrates this when he self-administers a double dose of Pet Cafe, with two iPads. One can only wonder what he'd do with three.

### RAND Releases "Report Support" for Tech in ECE Settings

On March 3, RAND Corporation released a 20 page PDF at http://www.rand.org/education/projects/t-is-for-technology.html that concludes, very generally, that early childhood education can be "key to bridging the digital divide." OK, we'd certainly agree with that. The report, sponsored by the PNC Foundation, is frustratingly scant on details, however. It could provide some political support to those who want to make the case that the integration of technology in early childhood education should be a priority. It concludes "to enable their effective use, preparing teachers and supporting parental involvement among disadvantaged families will be critical." RAND will host a forum on May 20 in Pittsburgh to discuss the report.

## 5 sites & ten videos about
## PIZZA

What's gooey cheesy, and one of the most popular food choices in the world? PIZZA! Let's learn more.

**1. Where did pizza come from?**
Pizza has been around in some form or another since prehistoric times, according to wisegeek.com (http://bit.ly/1clBD9w). The first modern pizza, like the one pictured above from one of our local pizza shops, started appearing in Naples, Italy around 1890.

**2. What is "rennet" and why should I care?**
Rennet is an enzyme from cow stomachs (or it can be made from vegetable oil) and you need it to turn milk into Mozzarella cheese, according to the Pioneer Woman (http://bitly.com/MKVKkZ).

**3. How big was the largest pizza ever made?**
At http://bit.ly/1dfKTtH you can read about a single pizza as big as a hockey rink.



**4. How many types of pizza are there?** Thousands, but they fall into about 14 of the most common categories like deep dish and Sicilian. How many can you name? See the entire list at http://bit.ly/1hyb2FD .

**5. What are the three most popular pizza chains in the world?**
Pizza Hut, Domino's Pizza and Papa John's are the largest three chains, according to http://bitly.com/1fEMnKC.

**6. What do pizza and Volkswagons have in common?**
According to "todayifoundout.com bitly.com/1hJ64pe you can learn how 50% of the pizza shop that would become Dominos Pizza was once traded or a car. The company was later sold for $1 billion.



### Application
So... are you hungry yet? We dug up some recipes; for younger children and older children. Make sure you have help in the kitchen.

FOR BEGINNING COOKS
Nick Jr. has a set of themed pizzas that use pre-made dough and easy to find toppings, at http://at.nick.com/ML1o6K

FOR ADVANCED COOKS
This recipe tells you how to make pizza dough and all the toppings.
http://bit.ly/MoCwCD

 **Megan's Pizza Videos**

Want to see the largest pizza in the world being made, or how to make "the best pizza in the world?" LittleClickers Editor Megan Billitti made this YouTube playlist.
http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcBVHzUUEKwnOTF-OsIKrD1N_1w6s5eI8



*Interact with this page online, at http://www.LittleClickers.com/pizza*

## The Geekdad Asked, So I Answered...

## Facebook Should Buy the College Board

Bill Shribman of WGBH, who is now one of the Geekdad blog contributers, interviewed me for a column and asked a series of unconventional questions, like "who should Facebook buy next." His post is part of a new series of Geekdad posts (full context, at http://geekdad.com/2014/03/meet-warren-buckleitner/). I'd be interested in knowing what others think about this idea.

**Geekdad: If Facebook asked you for investment advice, who would you tell them to buy next?**
Wouldn't it be great if Facebook bought ETS (Education Testing Service) ... who runs the College Board... who administers the SAT? What if Facebook technology were used to create the ultimate student portfolio (to compliment the test). ETS knows a lot about knowledge measurement. If you're a parent, your kid is going to take the SAT some day, and trust me, it can be a less-than-joyful end to a K-12 education. At it's worst, the three-hour mental marathon is a real life nightmare, where you try to justify your entire life of learning in just 3 hours, with a #2 pencil. Yet, despite it's questionable validity, we continue to inflict our high school juniors with this rite of passage, exactly when they are most stressed about things like proms, friends and college. Google and Facebook now have incredible cloud-based assessment technology for collecting both qualitative and quantitative information about a developing human. They could apply this knowledge to minimize the importance of the big test.

**Geekdad: How does this play out?**
Simple. New parents create a specialized Facebook (or G+) page for their new baby (free with diaper ads), to start accumulating all sorts of video and anecdotal information. The wizards of Google work with teachers to make visual rubrics, to help novice parents understand how life experiences align to the common core standards. So now a future teacher, or employer, can see a video of that child's first steps, piano recital or woodshop project. It should start with birth records, and continue, forming a portfolio of life accomplishments where key adults serve on the friends list. By the time a child leaves high school, this collection of information will help a college admissions officer or employer better understand a child's true competencies; potentially reducing the need for "the big test."

It's exciting to think that every teacher, librarian, friend, uncle or grandparent could play a valid part as a child's tutor, and everyone in the community becomes responsible for that child as an emerging learner. This tool follows a child, from school to school, or town to town.

Both Facebook and Google have solved the tricky problem of monetizing tiered access to a secure profile, and Google and Facebook have the cloud technology to back up such a system.

## No pain, no gain. My upgrade to Mavericks and iMovie 10

Like a sudden plunge into the icy waters of lake Superior, I updated my trusty MacBook Air to Apple's new operating system, called "Mavericks" or 10.9.2 Along with it came a set of other major remodelings of Apple programs, including Keynote, iPhoto, Mail and iMovie. The process started as a disaster, but ended well.

I'd been ignoring Apple's nags to update especially after reading the mixed reviews of a program I use a lot: iMovie. So first the bad news —my first attempt at upgrading wiped out a day's work and my hard drive. And iMovie 10 *is* a completely different product than iMovie 9. If you remember the pre-2007 versions (6.x and earlier) you'll find this update to be a welcome improvement. But if you've learned to edit on iMovie 9, you'll have a bit of unlearning and re-learning to do. But it's worth it, because the new iMovie is like training wheels for FinalCut, because timelines are back. Before you upgrade..

1. Backup. I use Time Machine, Apple's life-saving backup program. In this case, it saved my digital life.
2. If you run into a snag like I did, search on the error message and see what others have done. My update required reformatting my hard disk and rebuilding everything with Time Machine. Hopefully yours will be smoother.
3. Make sure your hardware can handle the software. Mavericks is a major shift into Apple's future. If your Mac is more than 5 years old, you should think twice; and also if there's a program that you depend on, check first to make sure it works.

I'm a week into Mavericks and I can report that I'm pleased that I updated. There was most certainly a pain, but the gain was worth it.

## The Toy Fair Huddle Video is Live

If you have an interest in the toy industry's take on technology, there's a video for you. Thanks to some nice editing by Scott Traylor, you can listen to the comments of experts like Scott, Chris Byrne, Reyne Rice and Robin Raskin, as you see examples of the products on the screen. Some of my own observations:


Toy Fair Huddle 2014

• Attempts at tablet-dependent toys have dried up since last year. But toys that have free apps designed to supplement and extend their branding or play experience have greatly increased.
• Moore's law is shaping toys, through subtle technologies like QR codes, LEDs, AI, Lithium batteries and Wi-Fi. But there was really no single breakout toy that comes to mind.
• Themes of guns, pink for girls and blue for boys are alive and well, and will never die. Watch the Toy Fair Huddle video, at http://youtu.be/6ttV-2mKnw8

## LittleClickers: Pizza

Last month I went to Naples, Italy, which Megan Billitti tells me is the home of modern pizza. So I conducted some first hand research that I very much enjoyed. If you like pizza, make sure to visit http://littleclickers.com/pizza.

So, there you have it... another busy month. Enjoy the issue, and have a wonderful March.

*W. Buckleitner, Editor*
*CTR*

*Coming in your April CTR: Library Friendly Apps and Video Games*

# 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.



http://youtu.be/bAHkW4SYaFU

• 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 responsivity 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 **Faccimo!** (Italy) scored points with the jurors; and the innovative navigation combined with the abiltiy to stretch your feet to match your age, moved **This is my Body** (Germany) to the short list.*
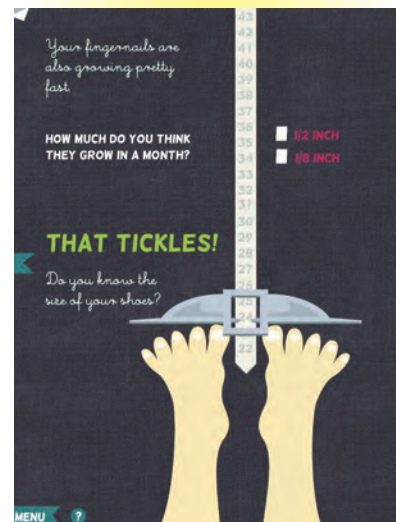




## Dust or Magic

### 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

*Here's an alphabetical listing of both the feature reviews (with ratings) and the new and future releases. "Entry Date" refers to the date we first learned of the product.*

## 1000 Adventures

Books full of hot spots are common; so it's nice when the animated effects tie into something dear to any child -- his or her imagination

Made in Spain and presented in English, this nicely designed ebook contains 12 scenes, each depicting a day in a life of a child with an active imagination. In the bedtime "wild animals come to the call of my cry" as clothing items turn into exotic animals. On the way to school, a car turns into a spaceship. The app creates a nice context for talking about things that could be potentially fearful, and the link between imagination and reality. While we were not as impressed by the illustration and narration, we especially liked the touch counter that tells you how many things remain to be found on each page. For example, every scene has a certain number of hidden interactive elements. In the top left-hand corner of the screen, a counter keeps track of how many you have left to discover.

Details: Dada Company, www.dadacompany.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: counting, language, reading, guided exploration, imagination. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 2/9/2014. [WB]

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

## Amico Ragnolo

A delightful story with limited interactivity, Amico Ragnolo follows the beginning of an adventure between two unusual friends; a duck and a spider.

It starts when the duck finds Ragnolo the spider on a lettuce leaf, and wants to eat him, but the spider smiles.

It shows how diversity is overcome by curiosity and can forge special friendships. Content includes 14 pages, two reading modes, two games.

Details: Five5ifty, www.smallbytesdigital.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, friendship, diversity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 3/3/2014. [WB]

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

## Busy Shapes

You can't fit a round peg in a square hole. But you can have a fun time trying in this responsive set of auto-correcting classification puzzles, which have been carefully leveled for preschool-age children (typically starting around 2 and topping out around 5). The end result is a one-trick pony starter app that is fun to have on any child's iPad screen. It's especially recommended for ECE classroom use. We especially liked the multi-touch features that let more than one child work together (one can move a barrier; the other moves the shape). Incorrect answers are gently supported, by giving children another try.

The AI (artificial intelligence) tracks the time it takes each child to complete a level, and increases or decreases difficulty accordingly.

Additional features include customizable Guided Access, to make it possible to lock a child inside and the ability to track a child's progress. The best part about the app is that it never blocks or slows experimentation. The app is available in multiple languages, but this is less relevant because no language is used in the experience.

Details: Seven Academy, http://sevenacademy.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 2-5. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: classification, logic, shapes, colors, motion, spatial thinking. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 2/20/2014. [WB]

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

## Buzz Monster

Pricey but fun (and full of facts) this quiz game for 2-3 players lets teachers create their own Jeopardy style games and share them from one to many iPads. It comes from Australia, from the creators of Futaba Classroom Games and uses the INKids Learning Cloud Service to share the games with other iPads using a class code. Teachers already using Futaba can use their existing class codes with Buzz Monster.

Up to 3 students can compete using the buzz in game show format, on a single iPad. When a game begins, you take turns picking questions from the various categories. After the question is shown, the first player to "Buzz in" has the opportunity to answer the question. Points are awarded for correct answers, and if a player gets 4-in-a-row on the game board they can also earn bonus points. Play continues until all tiles on the board have been attempted, and the winner is the player with the most points. The 1st Edition includes Math, Geography, History, Science and English sets for Grade 5.

Topics include lower-case and upper-case Alphabet Matching, Dolch Sight Words for 1st through 3rd grades, Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication, Division, Telling the Time, Currency, Countries and Flags, American Presidents, Shapes, Animals, Foods and more. The app will be updated continuously with new curriculum. The responsive format combined with low entry price and cloud-based content delivery make this a very interesting app for use at home or school.

Details: INKids Pty. Ltd., www.inkids.com.au. Price: $5.99. Ages: 4-10. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: trivia: math, science, english, history and geography. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 1/9/2014. [WB]

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

88%

## Daniel in the Lion's Den

A bible story comes to life, in the context of a solid "Living Book" shell. It also is an effective language immersion experience, because of the way the text is highlighted. There's plenty of slapstick humor delivered by way of the animated hotspots. The graphics are a bit pixelated.

Content consists of ten (10) fully animated pages, touch and hear text that is highlighted, two modes (read and explore) and parental tips. See also The Story of Creation. Published by Little Ark Interactive in partnership with Wanderful.

Details: Wanderful, Inc., www.wanderfulstorybooks.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 5.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: religion, the old testament, bible. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 2/27/2014. [WB]

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

86%

## Dexteria Dots

Simple, clean and effective, this app uses a "Fruit Ninja" (slice) approach to let children play with Math concepts like number sense, counting, addition, subtraction, and greater-than and less-than, by using dots. Each dot has 4 attributes: numeral, pips, color, and relative size (e.g., a 4-dot is twice the diameter of a 2-dot).

At the Beginner level, all 4 attributes are displayed. As the difficulty level increases, one attribute is removed, until they reach Expert mode where they must solve problems based on size only. Each level can be played as many times as they like, resulting in wide age range appeal and high replayability. Bonus dots provide some fun surprises along the way.

The visual design of the app was heavily influenced by the iOS 7 color palette and aesthetic, and runs on both iPhone and iPad.

http://youtu.be/VxhYOagUrcE

Details: BinaryLabs, Inc., www.binarylabs.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone . Teaches/Purpose: math. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 2/18/2014. [WB]

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

92%

## Double Double

Simple, yet visually complicated, this collection of eighteen black and white visual puzzles challenges your conception of right side up and upside down.  You learn that shifting your point of view changes everything.

The interactive design is incredibly simple -- after you are shown a scene, you simple touch the screen to see the view flip 180 degrees. Because the flip is relatively slow, the meaning also gradually change. Relationships illustrated include up/down and left/right, trapped or escape, Spring and Fall, and more. Available in the Apple's iBookstore in English and in Spanish; available  everywhere except France, Portugal and Brazil.

Details: And Then Story Designers, www.and-then.us. Price: $.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: perspective, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars):  4.3 stars. Entry date: 2/25/2014. [WB]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ease of Use | 10 | 87% |
| Educational | 8 | |
| Entertaining | N | |
| Design Features | N | |
| Good Value | 8 | |

## Dr. PetPlay - Pretend Play Veterinarian

Designed to enhance pretend play, this app turns your iPad into a clipboard of the variety that a real vet might hold during an examination.

You start by choosing a category of pet from ten available. You then make a profile for your pet, taking a photo with your camera. You can then conduct an examination, using a fake heart monitor and thermometer. The best part is the fake x-ray. Unfortunately the photo you take isn't shown as an x-ray.  This app could possibly be of use in an early childhood classroom, where there's a pretend area. Much of what the app does could also be achieved by a low tech clipboard and a piece of paper.

Details: Pretendasaurus, LLC, www.pretendasaurus.com.  Price: $2.99. Ages: 6-10. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: science, medicine.  Entry date: 12/6/2013.

## Drôles d'animaux de A à Z (Funny Animals from A to Z)

Take a field trip to Paris with this excellent French immersion experience. It's not just language --- you also get a dose of zany art and music; delivered by way of a beautifully illustrated animal alphabet book. There's a donkey knowing a machine breakdown, a jaguar escaping the zoo to join his savannah, a xiphophore accepting his fate to belong to a totally unknown species ...

Available only in French. You can tilt the screen to make the elephant move, either side-to-side, or front to back. The graphics are very clever; and it is an excellent exposure to French. But the interactivity could be more responsive, which lowers the ratings.

YouTube: http://youtu.be/dY71AYTe3Bk

The free "lite" version is here https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/droles-danimaux-de-a-a-z-lite/id625276763?mt=8

Details: Goodbye Paper, www.goodbyepaper.fr. Price: $2.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: French, alphabet. Rating (1 to 5 stars):  4.1 stars. Entry date: 2/3/2014. [WB]

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

## FingerPaint Duel

Once you get past the rather wordy introduction, this game is a lot of fun, and it creates and excellent setting for two player gameplay.

The idea is to race to see who can most accurately fill in a target shape. You start with a simple circle, and end with a rather complicated picture of an animal. It is also possible to create your own duel design. Each player sits face to face, with a long end of the iPad. Each is presented with the same target to color. The one that most accurately replicates the target wins the most points. Drawings are scored automatically; with more points awarded for speed.

This is a new type of iPad mediated play, where the device sets the challenge and acts as an objective scorekeeper, and manages the progress.

Note that there are two versions of the app: a lite version, and the more expensive EDU version (which we reviewed).

The app can store up to 15 player profiles, each with a picture.

Details: Cribster UG, www.cribster.biz. Price: $3.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor skills, art, spatial relations, drawing, sketching. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 2/25/2014. [WB]

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

## Flappy Bird

Flappy Bird is a painfully hard timing game where you make your way through a sidescrolling maze. It has both positive (the bell, score and progress) and negative (the shock) reinforcements that are delivered quickly. Because it is easy to start over (and over and over), it has the potential to become addicting. Like a loose tooth -- it "hurts good." It is a free app, monetized by ads.

Details: dotgears Studio, www.dotgears.com. Price: $free. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: timing. Entry date: 2/25/2014.
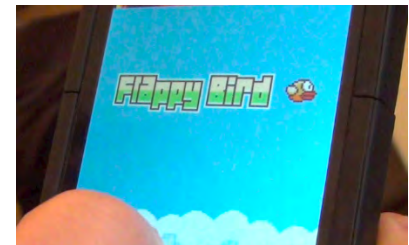
## Forza Motorsport 5

Like the cars it lets you drive, Forza Motorsport 5 is an elegant mix of power and beauty. A launch title for Xbox One, this racing simulator has some especially noteworthy features; some unique to racing games in general. The final verdict? It's a thrilling and amazing game, with a 9.8/10. Strengths are the exciting racing and amazingly clear graphics. Weaknesses are the need for an Internet connection and a slow loading time.

Instead of racing against computer controlled opponents, you race against "Drivatars" that represent the skill sets of other real human players. So after you finish a race, your behaviors might show up on a racetrack in someone else's living room. This cloud computing feature is part of the DNA of the new Xbox One, but it requires that you register and have an active Internet connection.

The cars are amazing, both in the way they look and the way they run. It is also possible to customize decals and paint jobs. It is easy to download and drive other cars; or upload cars and have them rated by the Forza community. You can set your Drivatar difficulty from new driver to extreme expert; harder levels earning more money, which can be used for such things as a new transmission, better steering, wheels and so on.

So, how does Forza Motorsport 5 compare to Gran Turismo? We found the cars easier to upgrade and drive, and the sharp 1080p/60 fps graphics are the best we've seen. Our only gripe is the very long load time. The bottom line? If you have an Xbox One, get Forza Motorsport 5. They're made for one another.

Details: Microsoft Game Studios, www.microsoft.com/games. Price: $60. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Xbox One. Teaches/Purpose: sports, driving, automotive engineering. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 2/6/2014. [WB]

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

## If I Ran the Horse Show

If you teach or live with a young horse nut who also is an emerging reader, or perhaps one visits your library, here's the ideal experience.

This 29 screen "book app" lets you join the Cat in the Hat, as he visits a horse show and explores the horse related vocabulary that is surprisingly un-watered down. You learn horse history, anatomy and such things as how they are measured by way of highlighted images and picture highlighting. As with other Oceanhouse Media apps, you can personalize the story with your own narration, and it is easy to jump around from page to page. There are both Read to Me and Read It Myself modes; and Thing 1 and 2 both provide more information about the current illustrations. We liked the supplemental graphics and authentic horse sounds. It's nice to see Oceanhouse Media's books getting more sophisticated. Content includes everything from the difference between fillies, foals, yearlings, mares, colts, dams, sires, and stallions; to horse anatomy from nose to tail; to the work of a farrier, as well as Western vs. English riding and facts about 13 of the most popular horse breeds. There is excellent text scaffolding, making this a strong early reading experience. The background music is a bit overbearing.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: $4.99. Ages: 5-10. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (OS 5.0 or later) 81.6 MB. Teaches/Purpose: reading, horses, comprehension, vocabulary. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 2/25/2014. [WB]

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

## Kidizoom Smart Watch

The Kidizoom Smart Watch combines a camera, watch and video recorder on one device. It has a 1.4'' color touch screen.

Features include both analog and digital clock displays, rechargeable battery, alarm clock, timer, stopwatch and voice recorder with voice changing effects. It connects to a computer by way of a USB cable. Coming summer 2014.

Details: VTech Electronics North America, www.vtechkids.com. Price: $50. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: time, photography. Entry date: 2/26/2014.

## LEGO Movie Videogame, The

We've always loved the work of TT games (the studio behind all the LEGO co-op games, since LEGO Star Wars), and this latest title continues the feelings. In fact, due to the fact that TT has leveraged the abilities of the latest consoles, it's safe to call this the best ever LEGO game. The only drawback might be the depth of content. There's so many twists, turns and game mechanics to master, it's possible to get confused.

Like the movie, you become Emmet -- the ordinary, rule-following citizen who is mistakenly identified as the most extraordinary person and the key to saving the world. Content includes 90 characters from the film including Batman, Superman, the Green Ninja and Gandalf. As you explore, you collect all sorts of things, including animated instruction pages that you need to build items in places like Flatbush Gulch and Cloud Cuckoo Land. There are 15 levels, each with drop-in/drop-out co-op play and split screen options.

The handheld games contain 45 missions with challenges. You can earn rewards and play with a variety of characters, as well as switch between them to solve the puzzles and unleash their super moves. Prices are $60 for the Xbox One and PS4, $50 for Xbox 360 and PS3, $45 for the WiiU, and $30 for the PS Vita and Nintendo 3DS.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: $60. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Xbox One, Xbox 360, PlayStation 4, PlayStation 3, Vita, Wii U, Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, co-op play, math, reasoning. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 2/28/2014. [WB]

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

## Love, The App

Featuring a compelling story and innovative torn paper scene transitions, Love, The App suffers from some unresponsive screens and looping music.

But the quality of the story and narration, and inventiveness applied to a book which celebrates the textures and trickery of paper, was enough to capture the attention of the BolognaRagazzi Digital Prize jurors, who said it "gives life to the vulnerability of the story."

The original book, published fifty years ago in 1964 in France, was originally described as a colored graphic poem, complete with holes in the paper. Those holes have been replaced by multi-touch effects -- hidden tabs and textured papers that gradually reveal the powerful story concept.

Based on the book "LOVE" by Gian Berto Vanni. The animation and programming were by Nico Diab. More information at http://www.lovestorytheapp.com.

Details: Niño Studio , niniostudio.com. Price: $4.95. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 2/20/2014. [WB]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ease of Use | 7 | 72% |
| Educational | 6 | |
| Entertaining | 7 | |
| Design Features | 8 | |
| Good Value | 8 | |

## MarcoPolo Ocean

Turn your iPad into an ocean-sized aquarium, that you construct -- one fish, shell or boat at a time. We've seen hundreds of touch screen, drag-and-drop puzzles, but none where all the parts are interrelated. As an added bonus, each item comes with a short factual description that is narrated by a marine biologist. So you not only see where different creatures live, but you learn facts such as "a fish's coddle fin moves from side to side."

The looping tropical background music can become maddening, but can be toggled off. It's also important to know that you can save or erase your child's work in the parents menu. Additional content includes books and activity suggestions for helping children learn more about ocean life.

The bottom line? This is an outstanding way to build a child's emerging interest in oceanography, without ever getting wet feet.

This app is the first in a series called MarcoPolo's Discovery Series.

Details: MarcoPolo Learning, www.gomarcopolo.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: oceanography, ocean life, layers of the ocean, fish, ecosystems. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 1/31/2014. [WB]

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

## Medieval Math Battle

This mashup of violence, gender bias and math facts is designed to make math fact practice fun. For some children it just might work.

The story puts a young boy (the prince) with a sword in Pokémon-like duel situations where the enemy is defeated with fast and correct answers to math facts. The goal is to save the princess. There is no help for wrong answers, the math is limited to flash-card style problems.

Enemies include dragons, goblins and trolls, who "die" (lay on the ground with no blood) when defeated. The faster you answer, the stronger your attack, and a report card feature manages progress and bonuses; ironically presented in quantities far greater than any of the math problems.

 Answers are presented as multiple choice items which is both a strength and weaknesses. The app is free, but only for the addition level. Subtraction, multiplication and division cost $0.99 each, or you can unlock all three for $1.99.

Details: SpinFall, www.spinfall.com. Price: $free for addition, $.99 for other levels. Ages: 6-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math facts, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 10/29/2013. [WB]

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

## My Monopoly

My Monopoly ($20) is a DIY edition of the famous board game from Hasbro that lets you customize your own game board, with up to 20 photos from your photo library. You need to supply your own printer -- and special sticker paper is sold separately. As shown at Toy Fair 2014. See CTR's FAQ video at http://youtu.be/ZJbv5S3iIBA

Details: Hasbro, Inc., www.hasbro.com. Price: $20. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: business, logic, creativity. Entry date: 3/2/2014.



## Mystery Math Museum

Simple yet solid, this sequel to Mystery Math Town (4.2 stars, CTR May 2013) features a new town with eight museums, each with a different theme and set of characters.

Your mission is to help a curious ghost rescue the dragonflies that are hidden in Mystery Math Museum by using math facts to unlock rooms. You earn talking portraits for your Gallery. Each picture has a story to tell and characters in the museum have plenty to say.

The eight museums include Sports, Wild West, Vehicles, Aerospace, Music, Ancient History, Art, and Prehistoric. The app offers multiple user accounts and the ability to create your own avatar.

You can also customize the math skills for each player, to include addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and varied number representations (dice and tallies). The bottom line? This app makes math practice fun.

Details: Artgig Studio, www.artgigapps.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math facts, story problems. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 11/11/2013. [WB]
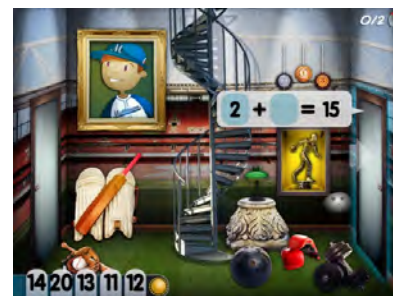


| | |
|---|---|
| Ease of Use | 8 |
| Educational | 8 |
| Entertaining | 9 |
| Design Features | 9 |
| Good Value | 9 |

86%

## Nancy Drew The Ghost of Thorton Hill

Nancy Drew has appeared in books, movies and PC / Mac platforms. This app marks her debut on tablets (iPad, Kindle and Android). Sadly, not much has improved since the PC/Mac days in terms of interface. The screens are presented slide-show style, and you don't always know where to touch to navigate. It's as if they've simply ported a mouse and keyboard interface into a multi-touch environment. As a result, you spend time solving the wrong kind of mystery -- how to navigate -- rather than collecting clues. We'll hope things improve in the next edition.

In terms of content, this app is promising. In the first of the series, Ghost of Thorton Hall (which is supposed to be the scariest), you learn of a fateful sleepover at the abandoned Thornton estate, which resulted in a ghost problem. You become Nancy, interviewing characters, solving puzzles and collecting evidence. There are two mysteries in this 508 MB app. Features include the ability to Fast Forward Conversations (called Fast Convo) which doesn't always work well, and multiple difficulty levels, from amateur to master sleuth. What also is less than clear is that you're only downloading a trial version of the app, with a timer that runs out after an hour of gameplay. So after you invest some time, you need to come up with $5.99 to finish the content which you've already downloaded. The app was developed in partnership with A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. digital.

Details: Her Interactive, Inc., www.herinteractive.com. Price: $5.99. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: logical thinking, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 3/4/2014. [WB]



| | |
|---|---|
| Ease of Use | 5 |
| Educational | 9 |
| Entertaining | 9 |
| Design Features | 7 |
| Good Value | 8 |

76%

## PANGO Disguises

Part of the Pango series, this nicely illustrated app lets you control story elements in five short adventures, each featuring Pango the raccoon.

Each story element is introduced through short, fun mini-games; starting with a dress-up up puzzle, where you drag and drop items onto Pango to create the central character. He might be a superhero, pirate, wizard, knight or dinosaur; which changes the story.

As you progress through the story, you shake, rub, strum and tickle the picture. The app features five interactive stores as well as a limited coloring activity. Available in English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese. Need to know: this app contains stereotyping, when Pango the prince rescues the beautiful princess; plus there's no shortage of references to candy.

Details: Studio Pango, www.studio-pango.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: logic, story elements, language, matching in English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 11/15/2013. [WB]



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

## Pierre et le Loup (Peter and the Wolf)

The worlds of animation, film and interactive media collide in this orchestral blend of games and videos, based on Peter and the Wolf by Sergueï Prokofiev. Content includes 30-minutes of film, and nine activities designed to call attention to the different voices of the instruments, and the various themes in the symphony. From an interactive design point of view, the app is hit or miss -- some of the activities are less than intuitive. It's easy to overlook these design shortcomings because the content is beautiful. The live video features musicians from the National Orchestra of France, with feature roles by a young boy and the conductor, Daniele Gattiis. The video is seemlessly merged with animated fonts that give life to the characters, and let you become the composer, mix the instruments, travel in the orchestra at 360 degrees. See a sample on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85D33OL6uLo&list=PL2. Winner of the BolognaRagazzi Digital Prize nonfiction category.

Details: Camera Lucida, www.cameralucida.fr. Price: $3.99. Ages: 4-10. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: music, memory, the orchestra. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 2/24/2014. [WB]



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

## Ready to Print

2/25/2014 Update: Version 3 of the Ready to Print App now includes voice prompts, updated graphics and a new activity called Touch and Drag. It also now has 194 levels in 13 activities and is available as a free update.

Teachers, take note of this app. Ideal for helping a child practice the fine-motor skills needed to make letters, this is a set of nine leveled touch screen exercises that was created by an Occupational Therapist. The idea is to use the iPad's multi-touch screen to replace, and improve upon, tried and true paper-based exercises.

The activities are nicely leveled, progressing from pre-writing skills to letters. You start by touching objects (e.g., butterflies to make them fly or bubbles to make them pop) and move up to tracing within lines. The final levels consist of upper or lower case Zaner-Bloser letters, and, as a treat, an open-ended free drawing activity. Visit http://www.ReadyToPrintApp.com for more details.

Details: Essare LLC, www.ReadyToPrintApp.com. Price: $9.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: letter recognition, upper & lower case, handwriting, fine motor development, special needs. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 4/23/2012. [WB]
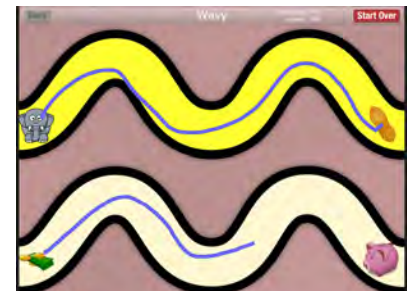


| | | 88% |
|---|---|---|
| Ease of Use | 9 | |
| Educational | 10 | |
| Entertaining | 8 | |
| Design Features | 9 | |
| Good Value | 8 | |

## Red in Bed

A nice story is mixed with responsive interactivity, in this short storybook app about colors.

In the story, the rainbow wakes up in the morning and goes out to color the world in its own hues. When Red feels sick, the other colors help by taking up some of Red's coloring tasks.

Green colors the grass, as well as a Rooster, green. And Blue colors the sky blue, along with a fire truck. When Red feels better, he colors them red again. Children touch items to color them, and each color has an associated note and can be played a little like a xylophone; and some hidden surprises.

Details: Red in Bed Books, http://redinbedbooks.com/. Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: colors, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 2/18/2013. [WB]
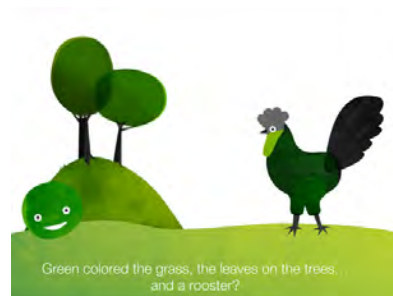
| | |
|---|---|
| Ease of Use | 9 |
| Educational | 9 |
| Entertaining | 9 |
| Design Features | 9 |
| Good Value | 9 |

90%

## Rules of Summer

Eighteen paintings are first presented by a rule, such as "never leave a red sock on the clothesline." Why? Because it might attract a giant red rabbit. Other rules include "never eat the last olive" and "never forget your password." Each reason for the rule is given by way of an abstract oil painting by Australian illustrator Shaun Tan (http://www.shauntan.net/), from a collection of art presented in the book by the same name. The interesting thing about this app is how your view of the painting starts extremely zoomed in, calling your attention to just one element of picture (e.g., the red sock). If you touch the screen, you zoom out, gradually revealing the context of the picture. This simple but innovative navigation technique uses an element of surprise to keep you interest.

Each painting is presented along with some sound effects and music, composed by Sxip Shirey. The menu uses icons, language is not needed.

Weaknesses include a limited amount of content for a very large download. Once you've seen all the paintings, there's not much reason to go back. However, could be an excellent art appreciation experience for older children.

Details: Wheelbarrow, www.wearewheelbarrow.com. Price: $6.49. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad (954 MB). Teaches/Purpose: art, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 2/5/2014. [WB]

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

88%

## Shape Arts: Geometry Creations

Every good early elementary classroom has tangram puzzles. This app takes the idea up a notch, with a nice set of geometric creatures; each made from seven shapes.

You can also turn your creation into a puzzle for others to solve, and take of picture of your masterpiece. Features include: make shape puzzles for others to solve; hundreds of new puzzles to play; see how many times puzzles are solved; collect marbles as you progress; works online and offline; save a photo of your work.

Weaknesses to note: The background music is disturbing but can be turned off in the parent's menu. But that also turns off the all important motion-related noises. Also, once you pick up a piece, you can't get rid of it or put it back on the tray. Neither of these are fatal flaws -- this app is still very much worth the download, especially with the "make your own" puzzle option.

Details: Lighthouse Learning, . Price: $2.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 6.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: math, geometry, tangrams, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 2/25/2014. [WB]
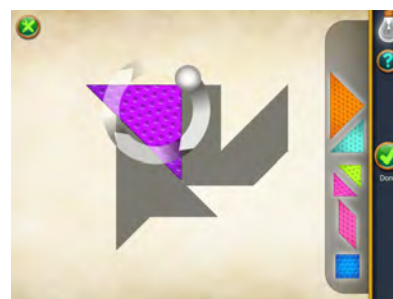
| | |
|---|---|
| Ease of Use | 8 |
| Educational | 9 |
| Entertaining | 9 |
| Design Features | 8 |
| Good Value | 7 |

82%

## Shiny Circus

As a former elementary teacher, I love to find apps like this one. While the story is less than thrilling (three friends are going to a circus), the four innovative activities do an excellent job connecting a child's fingers to some early math ideas.

In the story, the Shiny Circus has come to town and Charlie, Alice and Ralph (three animals) are going to the show. When Charlie helps the clowns prepare for their performance, he finds himself in the spotlight and needs your help. You explore measurement by making comparisons of length, width and area, and compare the measurable attributes of objects, including length, height, width and quantity. An "Angry Birds" type of sling-shot game lets you play with velocity and trajectory, and a balancing game lets you play with equality. Correct answers earn stickers.

Need to know: this isn't the most entertaining app we've reviewed, but it provides an excellent early math experience. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYs5rPTXyVU.

Details: Shiny Things, www.getshinythings.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 4-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 7.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: math, logic, balancing equations, seriation, patterns. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 1/30/2014. [WB]
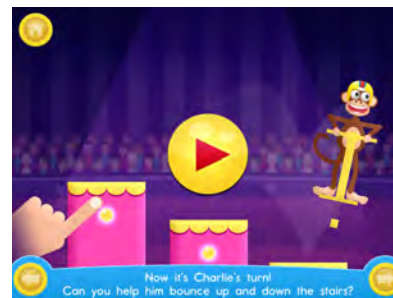
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ease of Use | 9 | 92% |
| Educational | 10 | |
| Entertaining | 8 | |
| Design Features | 9 | |
| Good Value | 10 | |

## Sphero 2.0

Sphero, the baseball with a mind of its own that you control with your iOS device, has been improving, both in terms of speed as well as intelligence. Created in Colorado by Orbotix, new 2014 peripherals include ramps and all-terrain Nubby covers. The new Sphero 2.0 App contains 20 levels of game play.

Sphero can also be used as an introduction to computer programming using Apps like MacroLab. New augmented reality games include The Rolling Dead and Sharky the Beaver. Sphero is an intelligent robotic ball that connects wirelessly to the virtual world with mobile apps, enabling new game play for mobile devices including: robotic movement, kinetic motion, controller support and augmented reality capabilities. The result is limitless possibilities for new types of gameplay that meld the virtual and real worlds for a fun gaming experience. See http://youtu.be/sxGdYiOYrvA.

Details: Orbotix, Inc., www.orbotix.com. Price: $130. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, programming. Entry date: 1/20/2014.

## Sphero 2B

Coming Fall 2014, a polycarbonate tube-shaped rolling toy from the company that makes Sphero (the baseball-sized rolling balls). Customizable tires, hubcaps, and accessories are promised along with "built-in infrared technology for multiplayer games." 2B is much faster than Sphero. Teachers note that Orbotix promises a "fully programmable robot." Connects to iOS or Android devices via Bluetooth LE, and is powered by USB charging. See the demo at CES at http://youtu.be/VqdPBLeYcmQ.

Details: Orbotix, Inc., www.orbotix.com. Price: $130. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: programming, logic, spatial relations. Entry date: 1/20/2014.

## Story of Creation, The

A bible story comes to life, in the context of a solid "Living Book" shell. It also is an effective language immersion experience, because of the way the text is highlighted. There's plenty of slapstick humor delivered by way of the animated hotspots that could actually make religion fun. The graphics are a bit pixelated.

Content consists of ten (10) fully animated pages, touch and hear text that is highlighted, two modes (read and explore) and parental tips. See also Daniel in the Lion's Den. Published by Little Ark Interactive in partnership with Wanderful.

Details: Wanderful, Inc., www.wanderfulstorybooks.com. Price: $3.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 5.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: religion, the old testament, bible. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 2/27/2014. [WB]



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

## Tabtor

Managed by passionate, fast-talking entrepreneurs, Tabtor is an iPad managed CAI (computer aided instruction) platform that is designed to manage a math and reading curriculum for a school. This system is asynchronous, which means that is possible for a student to work on a project that is off-line, and work is synced later to the server provided a wi-fi connection is available.

Students win medals (gold, silver and bronze) and can trade points for $5 gift cards to various online retailers.

Features include the ability to make voice tags between teachers and students (either can make and/or record them). The tracking tells the student what they're doing, so they can self monitor their work... It's like a digital pair of the teachers eyes, extended onto a child's tablet, that monitors work. A student knows that he or she is being watched and timed.

I was less than impressed by the interface on the version I tested, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rhg9L-OVtQ. To enter a math problem, for example, you need to use a clunky calculator and the reinforcement messages seem canned. These may be minor points; the heart of this system is the way content is delivered and tracked. The first two weeks are free, from that point on it's $50/month. Prices are cheaper for schools. Tabtor is a flagship product for iPads from PrazAs Learning Inc.

Details: Tabtor Learning, www.tabtor.com. Price: $50/month/student. Ages: 6-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: school readiness skills. Entry date: 2/4/2013.
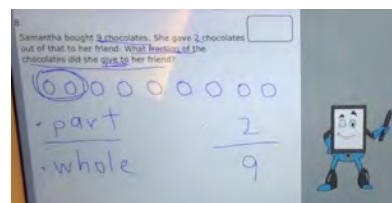


## Things That Go - Touch, Look, Listen

The third title in StoryToys' series of visual dictionaries, Things That Go, continues a tradition of outstanding responsive design, although in this case, there is one drawback. You can't drive or steer any of the vehicles on the pages.

Children discover 55 vehicles, grouped into 11 categories like trucks, diggers, tractors, trains, cars and buses, off-road vehicles, ships and boats, aircraft and fast machines. Each page is introduced by a rhyme, and images pop-up as each 3D scene unfolds.

Children can tap a picture and see and hear the associated word. There are some unusual vehicles, like quad bike and streetcar; although there may be some regional differences in the names. The app can also be used as a language learning tool by choosing a second language in the menu. Language options include English, French, German, Spanish and Chinese as either primary or secondary language. All in all, this is an excellent app.

Details: StoryToys, www.storytoys.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 2-4. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: language, cause and effect English, French, German, Simplified Chinese, Spanish. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 2/25/2014. [WB]



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

## This is My Body - Anatomy for Kids

 I Know My Body by urbn; pockets (Germany) mixes interesting facts with a non-page, non-linear, up/down, left/right tab-based navigation format. Noteworthy features include the bookmarks on the side of the screen that signal a different navigation path; and the ability to stretch a foot to match an interactive growth scale.

Details: urbn; pockets, www.urbn-pockets.com.  Price: $1.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: anatomy.  Entry date: 3/5/2014.



## Toca Pet Doctor

We've reviewed a lot of veterinarian apps, but none that is as easy to use, or as playful as this one. Ideal as a child's first app, Toca Pet Doctor starts with a waiting room full of 15 critters, each with a problem. The worm is tangled into a knot, the cat has fleas and the frog has swallowed too many flies. Once they are cured, the pet is hungry, so you feed them the appropriate food. Then it's back to the waiting room, where you see the creature comfortably sleeping.

Solving the problem is a no-fail process. Getting the eye-drops into each of the spider's eight eyes looks challenging at first, but the drops keep falling (and there's a lot of eyes). It's also fun to feed the spider the crunchy flies.

Features include the ability to wake up the sleeping pets after they are cured, and play again. There's a nice variety of foods that have some scientific validity: there's flies, seeds, vegetables and fruits. No third party advertising, no in-app purchases and no stress. Just fun.

Need to know: The transitions are sluggish. After you've cured all the animals, you can wake them up to play again, but they do the same thing. The no-fail ease of use, combined with the personalities of each animal, make this app will worth the download.  Note: if you like this app, you'll also like Toca Doctor.

Details: Toca Boca, http://tocaboca.com/. Price: $2.99. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 5.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: causality, timing, fine motor. Rating (1 to 5 stars):  4.6 stars. Entry date: 2/24/2014. [WB]
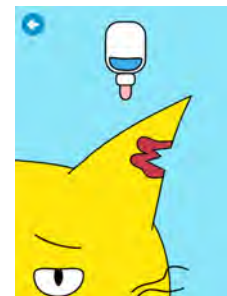


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ease of Use | 10 | 92% |
| Educational | 8 | |
| Entertaining | 9 | |
| Design Features | 9 | |
| Good Value | 10 | |

## Wonderbook: Walking with Dinosaurs

Part of the latest lineup of Wonderbook for Playstation 3, this augmented reality experience features characters from the 3D movie of the same name. You explore your own dig site to become a dinosaur expert, digging up dinosaur fossils, and bringing them to life. You will walk among giant  herbivores such as Triceratops and Stegosaurus and come face-to-face with deadly predators including Mapusaurus and Tyrannosaurus.

You can explore these predators and encounter the savage life and death struggles of prehistoric times as you interact with the dinosaurs. Available in either download or disc.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc., www.us.playstation.com. Price: $30. Ages: 8-up. Platform: PlayStation 3. Teaches/Purpose: language, spatial relations, science.  Entry date: 1/10/2014.
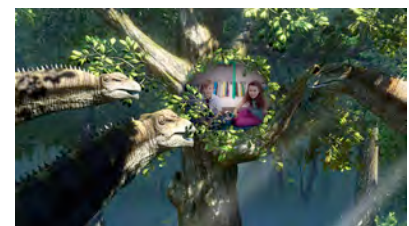
## Zometool

We don't usually review products that don't use electricity, but this is an exception, because of the math and science roots involved. Consisting of plastic sticks and special ball sockets, this set of plastic toys is designed especially to let you make geometric shapes. The $65 starter kit has 256 parts and lets you build a nice variety of shapes. Add on kits, which are compatible to all other collections, include The Buckyball ($30) and Crazy Bubbles ($20). At the top of the scale, the teacher's STEM + Kit costs $680 and fits in a large case (for 1,891parts). You can tell a child that a carbon molecule is strong, but they'll really get the idea after they build one. Note that the kit contains small parts that could be a swallowing danger, and is not for young children.

Details: Zometool Inc., www.zometool.com.  Price: $65 and up. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: math, geometry, art, science.  Entry date: 2/27/2014.