



Children's
TECHNOLOGY
REVIEW EXCHANGE

August 2017

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ctrex

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SCRATCH

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**Children's Technology Review
August 2017**

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* Denotes "Editor's Choice."

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"What apps support early language development?"

"I just purchased an iPad for my child. Which apps would you recommend?"

"I need some ESL games for Monday."

"What video games work best for fostering social play in a library setting?"



We have the answer. After two years of bare-knuckle programming, CTR's Director of Code Matt DiMatteo and I ready to show you CTREX 5.0 — **the best tool on the internet for technology-using teachers and librarians.** It's still not live, but you can test it with this link —> <http://reviews.childrenstech.com/rwd/home.php>

Features to try:

- **Responsive design.** CTREX was made with RWD (Responsive Web Design). That means it can sense your screen size and adjust accordingly. Try it on your phone, laptop or tablet, and rotate the screen. CTREX adapts.
- **Outside experts and their rubrics.** The KIDMAP and Four Pillars rubrics help you see interactive products using the eyes of other reviewers. Meet all of the current experts at <http://reviews.childrenstech.com/rwd/experts.php>
- **A healthy exchange.** Compare our ratings with CTREX Expert Claudia Haines on The Sneetches <http://reviews.childrenstech.com/rwd/review.php?id=19696>. Different experts raise different issues, helping you make better decisions.
- **The Flex Rubric System** — CTREX is the first to use a DIY rubric system. So you can wrap up to 50 "Quality Attributes" around any product. You can also share your ratings next to ours, and bookmark your review in your profile.
- **No selling. Period.** Unlike many other review sites these days, we don't make money when you buy a product. CTREX is designed to inform, not sell.
- **Recommendations.** CTREX has the KAPi and BolognaRagazzi juror picks; along with hand-picked lists to support your curriculum, age or platform.
- **Data exporting.** Use CTREX to populate your library database, or send a bookmarked list of recommendations to a busy parent.
- **Site Licenses.** Administrators get their own control panel that lets them track usage at their library or school.
- **A Publisher Directory.** Only CTREX has the contact information for 2649 publishers, at <http://reviews.childrenstech.com/rwd/publishers.php>
- **Just the facts.** CTREX gives you details first, followed by informed, authored opinions. Bias is disclosed and flagged.

We're always sanding the interface, so your feedback is especially helpful.

Dust or Magic

Save these dates!
www.dustormagic.com

October 22-24 • Digital Storyteller's Retreat at the Highlights Foundation

in Boyd's Mills, PA Three days at the intersection of language, literacy, storytelling and emerging technologies. \$1000 (all inclusive), including transportation to/from New York City airports.

November 5-7 • 17th Annual Dust or Magic Institute on the Design of Children's Interactive Media

The original event that started it all. Review the year in toys, video games, apps, AR and VR with the best minds in the world; all in one room, at the Inn at Lambertville Station, in New Jersey. \$1480/seat.

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SCRATCH

Read this column online, with links, at www.littleclickers.com/scratch

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

LittleClickers is brought to you by Computer Explorers, who offer camps on programming.

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Scratch is a computer language plus a file sharing system used by a huge international community of older kids (mostly aged 9 and up). While you can't use Scratch to make a commercial app, it is possible to replicate games like Pong or Flappy Birds. You can also Scratch to make interactive art, tell stories or animate objects. You can even turn your camera into a sensor. Let's learn more about Scratch.

1. How do you get Scratch? Using a laptop (Mac, Windows or Chrome) go to www.mit.scratch.edu and make an account. A camera and microphone is recommended. Try to get the cat to move.

2. How much does Scratch cost? Nothing. And there are no ads or sponsored content, either. According to <https://scratch.mit.edu/info/faq> Scratch was paid for by grants.

3. Who invented Scratch? A team of geeks at the Lifelong Kindergarten group at the MIT Media Lab. No single individual invented Scratch. But the most important influence was Seymour Papert, a mathematician who died last year. Learn more about Dr. Papert at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seymour_Papert

4. What can't Scratch do? Scratch projects can't be more than 10 MB, and Scratch won't work on an iPad or Android tablet. In addition, you can't use Scratch to make a commercial app. For that, use something like Unity www.unity3d.com instead. Learn more about Scratch, at <https://scratch.mit.edu/discuss/>

5. There is a cat in Scratch. What is his/her name? The famous cat is actually a sprite, and it doesn't have a name. Staying true to the philosophy of Scratch, all the ideas come from you. So it's up to you to name the cat.



APPLICATION: How to get started

Step 1: Find Scratch. On your computer, type the word "Scratch" into any search engine, or go to <http://mit.scratch.edu>

Step 2: Register. Think up a screen name and password. You'll also need an email address in order to confirm the account. Login, and choose "Create."

Step 3: Take the tutorials. We've linked to some tutorials in this month's YouTube playlist. It's also smart to preview samples. https://scratch.mit.edu/starter_projects/

Scratch on YouTube

Want more? Here's a video playlist that go along with this column

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcBVHzUUEKwn-s6489V9trfvuL96O-R8F>



Can the Sneetches App Be Improved?

A CTREX Expert Weighs In

In these times of wall building and division, we think the world needs *The Sneetches* -- a story from the 1950's to help illustrate the concept discrimination.

So when the second *Sneetches* app came out last month, we were happy to overlook a few shortcomings to put the App on our Editor's Choice list.

Claudia Haines, a CTREX Expert and Librarian from Homer Alaska gave the app much lower rating that was generated by a different evaluation tool. While she agrees that the *Sneetches* message is important, the KIDMAP DIG rubric pulled up some other issues that we missed.

First a refresher on the *Sneetches*, thanks to Wikipedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sneetches_and_Other_Stories

The Sneetches and Other Stories by Dr. Seuss was first published in 1953. There were four stories in the collection, dealing with tolerance, diversity, and compromise. Besides *The Sneetches* there were *The Zax*, *Too Many Daves*, and *What Was I Scared Of?*

Some *Sneetches* have a green star on their bellies. At the beginning of the story, *Sneetches* with stars discriminate against and shun those without. An entrepreneur (Sylvester McMonkey McBean) (calling himself the Fix-It-Up Chappie) appears and offers the *Sneetches* without stars the chance to get them with his Star-On machine -- for three dollars.

The treatment is instantly popular, but this upsets the original star-bellied *Sneetches*, as they are in danger of losing their special status. McBean then tells them about his Star-Off machine, costing ten dollars, and the *Sneetches* who originally had stars happily pay to have them removed in order to remain special. However, McBean does not share the prejudices of the *Sneetches*, and allows the recently starred *Sneetches* through this machine as well. Ultimately this escalates, with the *Sneetches* running from one machine to the next....

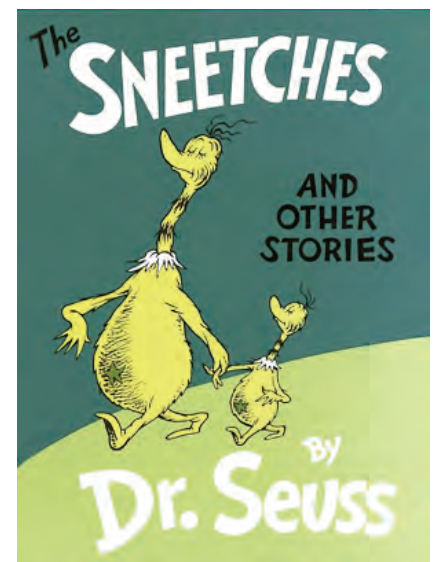
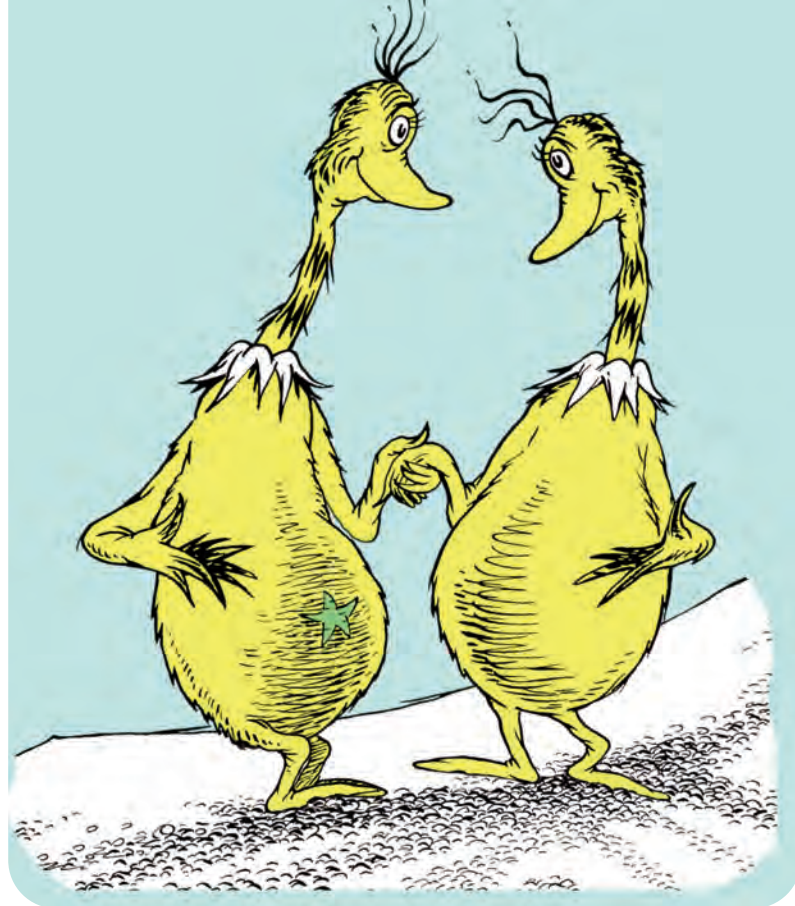
"...until neither the Plain nor the Star-Bellies knew whether this one was that one... or that one was this one... or which one was what one... or what one was who."

This continues until the *Sneetches* are penniless and McBean departs as a rich man, amused by their folly. Despite his assertion that "you can't teach a *Sneetch*." The *Sneetches* learn that neither plain-belly nor star-belly *Sneetches* are superior, and they are able to get along and become friends.

"*The Sneetches*" was intended by Seuss as a satire of discrimination between races and cultures, and was specifically inspired by his opposition to antisemitism.

The Oceanhouse Media treatment of the *Sneetches* mixes in early reading instruction, via hidden phonics games for beginning readers. A parental control panel lets you toggle on/off these features, allowing us to give the app a higher rating. The only thing you can't turn off are the looping movements on many of the pages.

As you can see, different experts have different opinions and ratings, and use different rubrics. We feel it is our job to pull out these informed opinions and put them at your fingertips. Haines ends her review with "I hope this is the beginning of a conversation and I welcome all discussion about this review."



Same App, Different Ratings

The Sneetches Read and Play

*Rating 1.8 stars or F, using the Kidmap DIG checklist Rubric.
Claudia Haines*

While *The Sneetches* is a story about two important topics, diversity and acceptance, I struggle with the original tale and its execution here.

At a basic level, kids don't get to see how the Sneetches, different only in the presence of a star on some of their bellies, resolve the issues they have with each other after McBean runs off with their cash. After such a lengthy conflict, the quick resolution is unsatisfying.

Do the Sneetches magically decide to accept each other or do they resolve their differences in specific ways before they get to hand-holding?

Kids are observant. They see and know prejudice and how deep it can go. With more detail or support materials, in a case like this when an original story is being digitized, stories can often help kids navigate social situations and entertain, if done right.

While the app is technically sound, has nice text highlighting and labeling, and is easy to navigate, I rated this app low using the KIDMAP diversity and inclusion rubric for several other fundamental reasons-

- I wish I knew more about the creative team. I couldn't tell how diverse the team is because the Oceanhouse Media site lacks any specifics. Diverse teams often see aspects of media differently and these multiple points of view can help create content that has a broader appeal and relevance.
- The app and developer's website offer little in the way of instructional guides or extension activities. This is a missed opportunity and something families and educators are coming to expect. Wouldn't it be helpful to offer caregivers and educators ideas on how to talk about diversity and inclusion?
- The in-app activities seem disconnected from the story, interrupt the story's flow and distract from the reading experience. Dr. Seuss stories tend to be long, especially for young children, and I wish these activities were directly connected to the inclusive message and at the end. The games may have value, but their placement is my issue. The lack of activities that celebrate inclusion and the positive side of differences is another missed opportunity.
- I would like a voice record and/or easy to access language options to help the app appeal to a wider audience. By allowing a child (and family) to toggle between a home language and English, for example, the app could act as a bridge for English language learners.

I hope this is the beginning of a conversation and I welcome all discussion about this review.

The Sneetches Read and Play

*Rating: 4.9 stars, A+ using the Standard Rubric
Warren Buckleitner*

You'll find plenty of original Dr. Seuss art and more importantly -- ideas about inclusively -- in this "Read and Play" version of this Dr. Seuss classic. As with other Oceanhouse titles, you can freely explore each page, tapping any illustration or word to see the printed label and hear a clear pronunciation. As a result, this is an excellent app for beginning readers of English because of the way that it lets you freely explore new vocabulary.

Be sure to explore the parent options where you can toggle on/off the Read To Me features. There's also an Auto Play feature. Other features include the ability to track minutes spent reading, and see which pages were read. Content includes 12 mini-games, including Memory Match, Jigsaw Puzzle, and Word Search and Sequence.

Need to know: there is an older version of "The Sneetches" that should not be confused with this version. The difference is that this version has hidden phonics games. Otherwise the art and touch-hear features are the same.





Feature Reviews and New Releases

AUGUST 2017

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.

Bob Books Spin and Spell

Designed to introduce early readers to word families through connecting words and sounds in short words. The app has a lot of repetition, picture-word association, and focusing on specific parts of the word. Children spin a dial to complete a word, focusing on either the beginning, ending or middle sound. Every word is associated with a new picture on their word list. Content includes 50 new words.

Details: Bob Books, www.bobbooks.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-5. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: writing, spelling, reading. Entry date: 8/1/2017.



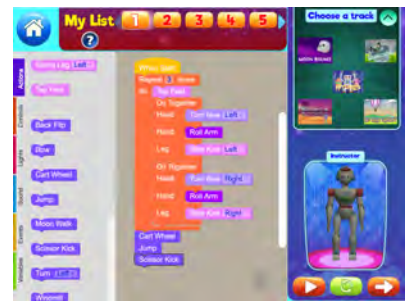
Boogie Bot - Coding for Kids

Program an on-screen robot to dance using Google's visual programming language Blockly.

In the full version all levels are open and kids can choose where they want to start. There are five levels: WiseOwl (Very Easy), Champ (Easy), Whiz (Medium), Genius (Hard), Einstein (Very Hard).

You can earn coins after each coding unit which can be used on a dance floor. The music and parts of the dancing room can be programmed. So if you want smoke or bubbles, you can work it into the dance routine. Price - The app is available for free, with full bundle at \$4.99.

Details: NybleApps LLC, <http://nybleapps.com>. Price: \$free with IAP of \$4.99. Ages: 9-11. Platform: . Teaches/Purpose: coding, music, programming. Entry date: 1/10/2017.



Circle With Disney

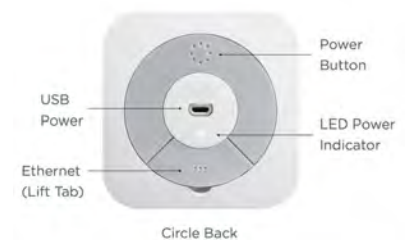
This is a hardware device that works in concert with your phone or tablet and your router. It promises to "let you manage up to ten of your home's connected devices."

According to the online reviews, this is easier said than done. Before you spend the \$100 for the Circle kit, make sure your existing router is compatible. And remember that Circle is not a router -- it works with one and the match must be perfect. There are other limitations -- you must make sure your children are not able to easily jump to a nearby Wi-Fi network (or data plan). Also, a guest to your home who wants to use your network must be registered as one of the ten devices, and the extra filtering could get in the way of their experience.

Circle can't stop your child from viewing off-line content, such as books or movies that have been downloaded and stored. That includes off-line versions of Minecraft.

Need to know. This device is good in theory, and it might help you manage your home network usage. But it is easy for reality to get in the way. It's never smart to get between a motivated child and something they are interested in. The bottom line -- there is no filter that can replace a smart, aware parent.

Details: Circle Media Incorporated, www.meetcircle.com. Price: \$99.00. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: a hardware device designed to manage your home Internet. . Entry date: 7/17/2017.





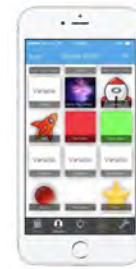
DevKit

Use this app to make an app. Well sort of. Downloading the app is free along with the first app. If you want to create more apps you can pay on an app by app basis of \$2.99 per app created. Pay an extra \$9.99 per App Store Build. Subscriptions cost \$19.99/year (5 new apps and 5 iOS App Store builds). Note that an "App Store build" simply means exporting your app's code and receiving it via email in the form of a zip file. If you want to upload it to Apple, you must have a developer's license from Apple.

There are three core concepts: Scenes, Objects, and Actions. Scenes are the different screens you might see in an app. Objects are the items that go in your scenes; and Actions are the commands that make things happen.

Schools can use this app for an Intro to Coding course. A school might purchase one Apple Developer's license, along with, say 20 "Developer's Subscriptions" for their iPad cart, and students would be able to collaborate, and upload as many apps as they would like to the Apple App Store.

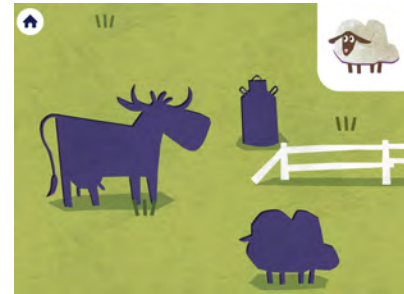
Details: Vybe Software LLC, <https://DevKitApp.com>. Price: \$free with IAP. Ages: 12-up. Platform: . Teaches/Purpose: coding, programming. Entry date: 7/24/2017.



Fiete Puzzle

There are no shortage of drag-and-drop puzzles on iPad screens. This one stands out. Not only does it feature the playful German sailor Fiete, but the puzzles are easy-of-use. In addition, they all flow together under topics that make sense to young children. The ambient sounds are also noteworthy. Content is organized into nine themes (you get two, free) each with about twenty items to match. These include zoo animals, a farm, fire vehicles, the supermarket, a campfire, a birthday party and bed time. Each item comes with an associated sound. We liked how one puzzle morphs into the next, offering a logical progression to the challenges. You can also rewind a level, to play with the scenes you've made. Need to know: The app comes with two of nine levels unlocked, making it worth the download. The intuitive controls and large puzzle pieces make this a good starter app.

Details: Ahoiii Entertainment UG, www.fiete-app.com. Price: Free, with IAP of \$1.99. Ages: 2-5. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, puzzles, fine motor skills. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 7/6/2017. []



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

96%



LeapFrog Academy

LeapFrog is finally moving into a subscription model for school readiness skills. It's like ABC Mouse -- with no need for a LeapFrog device.

As children move through the different islands, they encounter dozens of carefully sequenced LeapFrog activities -- many of which were designed years ago after a great deal of testing. Unlike any previous LeapFrog release this service is the first to work on just about any internet connected tablet, computer or LeapFrog Epic tablet. Our tests revealed solid content that is well leveled, despite plenty of chatty narration and some slow transitions between the games. Note that loading time varies depending on your wi-fi connection. We found it easy to setup as many as five profiles for different children; and each can be at a different level (ranging from preschool to first grade). Each is given a different avatar.

As you play, you earn marbles that can be used for avatar swag. Features include the ability to save games to a child's individual profile for off-line play, and a parent dashboard that lets you check a progress.

Details: Leapfrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$7.99 month. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, Android, iPhone, Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: school readiness, phonics, early reading, logic, sequencing, math. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 7/19/2017. [buckleit]



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

82%



Scratch 2.0

Free, powerful and easy to learn, Scratch is a visual programming language that uses jigsaw-puzzle like bits of code that snap together, bringing programming within reach of novices.

Scratch works with any standard web browser, best on a Macintosh, Windows or Chrome computer. An Internet connection browser and Flash are required.

Scratch won't work on a tablet. You can install the Scratch 2.0 editor to work on projects without an internet connection. This version will work on Mac, Windows, and some versions of Linux (32 bit). Note that Adobe Air is required. To get started, visit <http://scratch.mit.edu>, and click on any project icon. If you create an account (with a user name and password), you can make your own program.

Features include an integrated paint editor that combines bitmap and vector graphics.

The online community is a key part of Scratch. So it is easy to make a program and then share it, or modify an existing project. The drag-and-drop puzzle pieces control on-screen Sprites, which can take any form (such as a digital photo of your dog, or perhaps a word from a poem, that is read out loud when it is clicked). There's also a set of Logo commands (such as Penup and Pendown) that will cause some to recall the language that was popular 25 years ago. Because you can record sounds or turn any digital picture into a sprite, the power of Scratch as a story telling or artistic tool begins to emerge. Finished products can be uploaded to an MIT website where they can be previewed on any browser, or downloaded and further edited.

According to Mitchel Resnick, the LEGO Papert Professor of Learning Research at the MIT Media Lab and director of the Scratch Team. "Scratch 2.0 is as much about coding to learn as it is learning to code." According to Mr. Resnick, "since the launch of Scratch in 2007 there are more than 3 million projects on the website." As a result, this new version of Scratch is backwards compatible with the old projects.

While Scratch is free and easy to use, there are some weaknesses to note. Deleting parts of code—such as a Sprite—is done by dragging it off the work area, which can result in accidentally loosing all or parts of a program. We wished there was a better undo or Control-Z option. We also noted that because Scratch is Flash-based, there are times when a lot of computing (and battery) power is used, especially when the camera is turned on. We also noted that clicking on a link can lead you away from your program, ahead of the autosave.

For those who have been waiting to take back the power of interactive media from Viacom and Disney and give it to the children, Scratch is a welcome new option—and you certainly can't argue with the price.

According to CTR Intern Matthew DiMatteo, "Scratch is legit. It's nice how they give kids this kind of programming power without appearing too formidable." Visit <http://scratch.mit.edu/> for more information.

Update 11/6/2016. 100 million unique visitors came to the Scratch website. 25,000 new projects are shared daily. Collaborations include Cartoon Network so kids can program with characters like the Powerpuff Girls; the LEGO Company and Intel for connects to LEGO WeDo robotics and Arduino 101 and Google to create Scratch Blocks, so that developers can add programmability to their toys, games, and other products.

See also ScratchJr.

Details: MIT Media Lab, www.media.mit.edu. Price: \$free. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: programming, debugging, logic, math, science, STEM. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 5/17/2013. [buckleit]



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



Sentence Sensibility

Great for upper elementary and middle school reading practice, this well-designed set of sentence building puzzles can challenge higher-level reading comprehension and sentence structure abilities.

You start with an easy tutorial and then move into the first two (free) levels, using sentences drawn from classic literature.

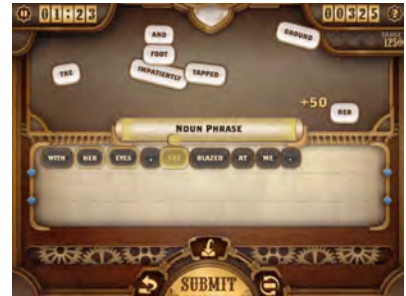
You start with a set of words often taken from a great work of literature (e.g., Peter Pan).

There are two modes: unscramble (complete the original sentence) and remix (create as many sentences as possible to earn points). A leaderboard lets you compete against other players, and the app keeps track of all your assembled sentences.

Testers liked this app, but wanted a better hint system and more control over the background sounds.

The cost is \$7.99 for the full version, or you can subscribe for \$5/month to get all the Touch Press Games monthly. This curriculum-friendly game was created by Schell Games for Amplify.

Details: Touch Press, www.touchpress.com. Price: \$7.99. Ages: 9-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: language, parts of speech, sentences, reading, comprehension. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 7/18/2017. [buckleit]



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

Sneetches Read and Play, The

You'll find plenty of original Dr. Seuss art and more importantly -- ideas about inclusively -- in this "Read and Play" version of this Dr. Seuss classic. As with other Oceanhouse titles, you can freely explore each page, tapping any illustration or word to see the printed label and hear a clear pronunciation. As a result, this is an excellent app for beginning readers of English because of the way that it lets you freely explore new vocabulary.

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Need to know: there is an older version of "The Sneetches" that should not be confused with this version. The difference is that this version has hidden phonics games. Otherwise the art and touch-hear features are the same.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, phonics, diversity, inclusivity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 7/24/2017. [buckleit]



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



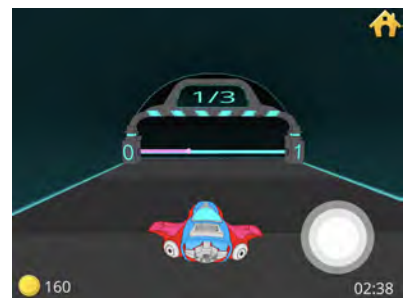
Teachley: Fractions Boost

Hands on math pedagogy comes to the racetrack. You drive by tilting your screen like a steering wheel, to try to drive your car through a gate, using a fraction clue as your key.

For example, if you are given a target fraction of 1/2, you must hit the gate in the center. If you miss, you are given a set of well designed tutorials that illustrate how fractions work. This app is especially good for fraction drill. It is backed by intelligent pedagogy that quickly rewards mastery, and supports the building of understanding. There's a school version of the app that syncs with classroom accounts, letting you personalize the experience.

Need to know: Turn off the looping music in the teacher's settings.

Details: Teachley, LLC, www.teachley.com. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 8-11. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: math, fractions, denominators, numerators. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 7/18/2017. []



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

