Children's
TECHNOLOGY
REVIEW

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See page 4.

On the cover: **LittleBits**, one of the ten winners of the 2013 KAPi prize. Reviewed on page 11.

* Donotes an "Editor's Choice."

Children's Technology Review EDITOR'S CHOICE 20 13 FOR EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN

2012 —> Tablets with Android Apps, the Mini & Surface, The Android Awakening, Embodied Cognition and the Pedagogical Renaissance....

not to mention "narrative driven interactivity" (aka eBooks), the Wii U and the new psychology of dual screen play. All in one year! That's why 2012 will go down as the most active and most interesting in my 27 years as a children's tech reviewer. It is the year we reached the digital tipping point when every child has a tablet. It's the OLPC (one laptop per child) dream come true and it means we actually could have a "pedagogical renaissance" where every child has access to any lesson, on any subject; limited only by their curiosity. Three forces that have pushed us to this tipping point.

1. Moore's Law (the relentless advance of technology).
2. The insatiable demand for the new media and new ideas and human curiosity among children.
3. A surge of cheap, quality software, in the form of apps. In the past 12 months, I've reviewed 480 mostly Apple apps, not counting 122 video games, and flipped through enough children's eBook pages to wear a trough in my iPad's screen.

Based on the above, what will next year bring? Here are some observations.

1. BREAKING OUT OF iTUNES. I recently saw a young girl pick up a Kindle HD, thinking it was an iPad Mini. She didn't care because Toca Hair 2 was running on the Kindle, and she wanted to make a hairstyle. Toca Boca smells a new market, and so will others. **Access to hardware will create demand for software, aka apps in 2013.**

2. LITTLE APP MAKERS CAN GET BIG. It's been fun to watch some small publishers prosper (http://bit.ly/RiEF0P), despite selling products that cost less than a dollar. This is possible because the installed base of hardware is growing, combined with a naturally curious base of customers (children) who are ravenous consumers of digital content. **Proven children's app publishers will become more valuable in 2013.**

3. BEYOND ANGRY BIRDS. There's been a marked increase in free apps that blur ethical lines by way of in-app purchases or embedded "smart" advertising. While I'm glad to see the FTC stepping in (http://bit.ly/VnC31P) there's no substitute for due diligence by adults. Ideally parents, teachers and librarians will steer children toward the higher rated products. This is idealistic thinking, however. **In 2013, we'll continue to have more powerful tools being used for less-than-powerful ways.**

As I peer into my Android 4.0 powered gorilla glass multi-touch crystal ball, I see a lot more tablets in children's hands and the continued evolution of app design. See for example The Orchestra by TouchPress (13) which lets you explore a symphony orchestra as if you're sitting in the horn section; not to mention the KAPi award winners on page 4. Enjoy the issue, and Happy New Year.

★ ★ ★ CTR ANNOUNCEMENTS ★ ★ ★

- *A new Dust or Magic eBook Retreat will be held April 21-23 in Honesdale PA.*
- *LittleClickers.com has a new look and a new site for 2013. See page 3.*
- *Are you a world-class digital storyteller? The BolognaRagazzi Digital Prize entry form is now open for entries. Learn more at http://goo.gl/yBrwY*
- *Don't miss the 4th Dust or Magic AppCamp, in Monterey, CA on May 19-21.*

Your Subscription is Your Key to 10792 Archived Reviews

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

LittleClickers Gets a New Look!

Welcome to the NEW and IMPROVED LittleClickers! Starting January 2013 (this issue) we've started using a newly remodeled website at the same URL: http://www.littleclickers.com. To create this new look, we used a set of tools called WordPress http://www.wordpress.org. After we downloaded a template onto our ISP (Internet Service Provider), we poured nearly ten years of columns into a fresh blog format. Why did we do such a crazy thing? Now it will be easier for us to publish, and you to participate. We can post and edit columns without worrying about codes and settings, and you can leave comments and help us fix stale links. We hope you'll continue to suggest future topics and links. To celebrate, here are six columns from the past year, both as a web page and as PDFs. Let us know what you think, and Happy New Year!

Inside an iPad. Have you ever wondered what the inside of your iPad or Kindle looks like? How thick and strong is the glass? Where is the CPU? How big are the batteries? Taking your mom's iPad apart is NOT a good idea, but you can still see what's inside. You can even see what happens when you drop one, at http://littleclickers.com/ipad

Dogs. Puppies and dogs are fun, but they require a lot of work. We'll show you the correct way to train a dog, and what they need in order to live a long, happy life. Don't miss the funny dog videos http://littleclickers.com/dogs

Mars. As you read these words, there's a car-sized robot driving around on Mars. And the driver is sitting in California! Does that make you curious? We have a special column just for you. We'll help you find out what you want to know -- things like "what did the landing look like" and "how long does it take a radio signal to get from California to Mars." (Between 5 to 20 minutes). We also discover how long you'd survive on Mars without a space suit (not long), and learn about some basic facts, like "Is Mars really red?" (Not really) and "Is Mars larger or smaller than the Earth?" (Smaller). Still curious about Mars? Visit http://littleclickers.com/aboutmars

Electric Vehicles. We've all grown used to stopping at the gas station, along with the smell of exhaust and worrying about global warming. But thanks to monster-sized lithium-ion batteries and computer controlled brakes (see http://1.usa.gov/QjSwCz) the days of gas-powered cars are numbered. Explore EVs (electric vehicles) http://littleclickers.com/electric-vehicles

Submarines. Last Spring, a special submarine called the Deepsea Challenger went to the deepest part of the ocean -- more than seven miles, straight down. Submarines use some of the most advanced technology we have. Did you know that a nuclear submarine runs for 30 years without refueling? It can also make it's own air and drinking water! Want to learn more? No need to hold your breath. Visit Submarines. http://littleclickers.com/submarines

Hurricanes. We recently experienced a huge hurricane -- Sandy -- first hand. As hurricanes go, ours wasn't very strong, in fact, here's a video from our town http://youtu.be/GUXYxZomqIs. But some hurricanes can tear buildings apart, in fact, here's a look what happens when a hurricane hits a gas station http://youtu.be/unV5KcSrY-I. Ours knocked out our power and delayed our issue for two weeks. Want to learn more about hurricanes? We sure did, so we found some links and videos http://littleclickers.com/hurricanes.

NEW! Easier PDF Downloads!
LittleClickers makes it easy for teachers and librarians to share "the best of the web" for children. To help, we follow these guidelines:
- Each column is available online.
- All URLs are printed in short form, so they can be retyped.
- URLS are active in the PDF.
- Everything fits on one page. This means that you can easily click or touch any link.

LittleClickers YouTube Playlists

Here's a link to all past LittleClickers YouTube playlists: http://bit.ly/TyzCuR
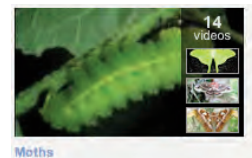
Interact with this page online, at http://www.LittleClickers.com

Living in Digital Times and Children's Technology Review Announce the 2013 KAPi Award Winners

The Most Innovative in Children's Technology to be honored on Thursday, January 10 at the 2013 International CES® in Las Vegas.

New York, NY (PRWEB) December 28, 2012. Collaboratively organized and produced by Living in Digital Times and *Children's Technology Review*, the fourth annual KAPi Kids at Play Awards honor the best of the best in children's technology. This year's winners have been selected and awards will be handed out on January 10th at 7 p.m. PT in the Venetian Ballroom at the 2013 International CES® in Las Vegas, Nevada. Owned and produced by the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA)®, the 2013 CES will occur January 8-11, 2013.

This year's KAPi Award winners were selected from a pool of 712 apps, video games, toys and other commercial digital products designed for children, as well as individuals who have made their mark in the world of children's tech.

Among the winners are breakthrough technologies that include a portal of power that allows toy giants to jump into a popular kids video game, technology that turns your TV two-way so kids can interact with their favorite Sesame Street characters, snap-together circuits for budding engineers and an at-home 3D printer, as well as the man credited for starting the maker movement.

"Getting the most respected thought leaders in kids' media to agree is no easy task, but this year it's clear to see that we've identified 10 winning technologies and technologists that have kid's best interest at heart," said Robin Raskin, founder of Living in Digital Times.

"We always learn so much from the KAPi juror discussion," said Warren Buckleitner, editor of Children's Technology Review. "Each category had many possible winners; at the end of the day we had to choose just one that raised the bar over last year."

The 2013 KAPi Award Winners Are…
1. Best Younger Children's App: **LetterSchool** by Boreaal Publishers
2. Best Older Children's App: **IMAG-N-O-TRON** by Moonbot Studios
3. Best Tech Leveraged Toy: **Skylanders Giants** by Activision
4. Best Video Game Software: **Kinect Sesame Street TV** by Microsoft Studios
5. Best Hardware or Peripheral: **Kindle Fire HD with Kindle FreeTime Unlimited** by Amazon
6. Best Technology Toy: **littleBits** by littleBits Electronics
7. Best Educational Technology: **BrainPOP GameUp** by BrainPOP LLC
8. Innovation: **The Cube** by 3D Systems, Inc.
9. Pioneer: **Dale Dougherty**, Co-Creator, Maker Faire; Publisher, MAKE Magazine
10. Pioneering Team: **Toca Boca**

Judges of the KAPi Awards consisted of 13 journalists and/or experts in children's interactive media, they were:

> Warren Buckleitner, *Children's Technology Review*
> Chris Crowell, *Children's Technology Review*
> Dan Donahoo, Wired GeekDad and Project Synthesis
> Chip Donohue, Erikson Institute
> David Kleeman, American Center for Children and Media
> Ann McCormick, Co-Founder, The Learning Company
> Frank Migliorelli, Mig Idea
> Robin Raskin, Living in Digital Times
> Reyne Rice, Toy Expert
> Carly Shuler, PlayScience
> Andrea Smith, Mashable
> Aleen Stein, Organa
> Scott Traylor, 360KID
> *Note that Judges took an oath not to vote on any product or category in which they thought they might have a conflict of interest.*

About Living in Digital Times. Living in Digital Times produces conferences and exhibits throughout the year that bring together the most knowledgeable leaders and the latest innovations that intersect technology and lifestyle. Among their many goals is to help companies understand what it means to be a consumer in today's digital world and stay a step ahead in identifying key trends in their given marketplace. Living in Digital Times produces the following summits and exhibitions at 2013 CES: CloudBase3, Digital Health Summit, Silvers Summit, Fitness Tech Summit, HigherEd Tech Summit, Kids@Play Summit, MommyTech Summit, Mobile Apps Showdown, Last Gadget Standing, Mommy Tech FashionWare Show and KAPi Awards. http://livingindigitaltimes.com

About Children's Technology Review
Founded in 1993, Children's Technology Review is designed to help parents, librarians and teachers better use technology with children by providing objective, comprehensive coverage of all forms of commercial products. CTR contains no advertising. It is published monthly for $30/year. http://childrenstech.com

About CEA
The Consumer Electronics Association (CEA) is the pre-eminent trade association promoting growth in the $206 billion U.S. consumer electronics industry. More than 2,000 companies enjoy the benefits of CEA membership, including legislative advocacy, market research, technical training and education, industry promotion, standards development and the fostering of business and strategic relationships. CEA also owns and produces the International CES – The Global Stage for Innovation. All profits from CES are reinvested into CEA's industry services. Find CEA online: http://www.CE.org and http://www.DeclareInnovation.com. Follow CES at http://www.CESweb.org.

For the original version of this release, see www.prweb.com/releases/prweb2012/12/prweb10276389.htm

Feature Reviews

Here's an alphabetical listing of new products, along with a full review, specific ratings and tester feedback. The "Entry Date" refers to the date we first learned of the product.

Be There: Yosemite

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

80%

Supplement your trip to Yosemite next summer, with a preview of what you might see, with your choice of ten 360 degree panoramas located in Yosemite Valley. The app uses your iPad or iPhone's internal compass, so you can explore as if looking through a periscope. Embedded hot spots let you learn more about what you're looking at.

Each view also has natural sounds to complete the immersive experience. This is the second in the "Be There" series, and Red Hill Studios calls it a "virtual presence" app that uses Red Hill Studio's Panopticon technology. Testers wanted the ability to zoom in or out, to explore as if in 3D space. All in all, this would be a nice supplement to a trip to Yosemite.

Details: Red Hill Studios, www.redhillstudios.com. Price: $0.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: geography, science. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 12/17/2012. [WB]

Bugs and Numbers

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

98%
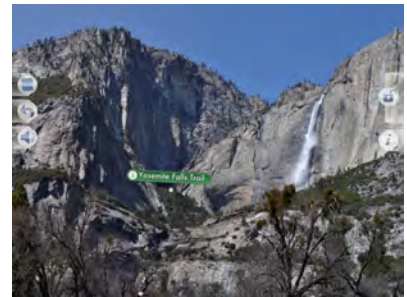
Third in the series, Bugs and Numbers contains 18 games and activities, designed around a bug city. The app is organized into three basic stages, to grow with your child from basic counting to early fractions. Stage 1 features: number and shape identity at the circus; practice left and right on an old arcade machine; seek and find while counting at a junkyard; tap and count while serving food at the local diner; paint by numbers at the gallery; and match numbers and shapes at the hotel. Features of Stage 2 include: count to 100 at the garage; trace numbers and shapes at school; arrange sequencing on a xylophone; comparisons at the theater; sort, count, and tally at the store; and math with 10 on the ferry. And Stage 3 features: US currency on the old claw machine; practice time at the train station; find patterns in the zen garden; work with fractions at the pizzeria; measure length and weight in the lab; and addition and subtraction on the gameshow. The app also features 36 achievements and rewards and multiple user profiles. See Bugs and Buttons (CTR February 2012) and Bugs and Bubbles (CTR August 2012). See http://youtu.be/aTRiZ3dHxkA.

Details: Little Bit Studio, LLC, www.littlebitstudio.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: math, counting, logic, classification. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 12/17/2012. [WB]

Color Uncovered

Turn your iPad into a hands-on exhibit right out of San Francisco's Exploratorium with this collection of 16 light/color experiments. Many have interactive experiments, where you stare at an illusion, or put a drop of water on the screen to see how screen colors are made.

There are sixteen topics that cover art, physics, and psychology of color. In keeping with the hands-on spirit, there are also a few color activities you can conduct yourself using your iPad and simple items you have at home: a CD case, a drop of water, and a piece of paper. You'll never look at color the same way again.

Details: Exploratorium, www.exploratorium.edu/. Price: $free. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: science, light, colors. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 12/14/2012. [WB]

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

Count to 100!

Teachers take note -- this interactive counting board is a wonderful way to help a child understand the concept of 100, as well as such things as all the numbers in between, by presenting ideas such as "there are twenty 5's that make up 100," or "counting by 12 creates stairsteps."

You start by setting up your number board with a challenge, such as to skip count by 2s, 5s, 10s and 25s. There's also a 'Tap Any' mode to freely explore numbers. We like how the app starts directly by showing the counting board, and the options are easy to find. There are no web links or in-app purchases. See http://youtu.be/canYevjHBOs.

Details: FuzzyBees, www.fuzzybees.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math, counting. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 12/9/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	10	90%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	
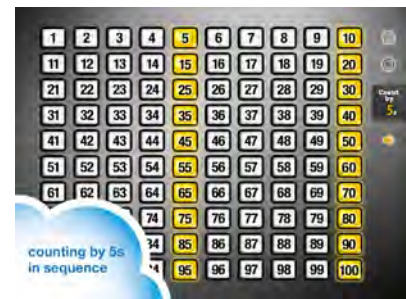
Elmo Story Collection

Six digitized Sesame Street books are housed in one starter library, called Elmo's Bookshelf, in this bite-sized portion of the subscription-based Sesame Street eBookstore. Note that these are flat, digitized books. They are not interactive -- one of our testers "homed" the app because it took a long time to load, and she was expecting to play with the characters.

To get started, you just touch a cover. This starts the reader, which lets you flip through the book, page by page. In the collection we reviewed, with six books, there were different page sizes, and two of the books were narrated by children readers. All books could be put on auto mode, where the pages flip by themselves. You can adjust the rate of page turning. There are no interactive features, and some of the pages' sizes (in Counting With Elmo) are too small, especially on the iPad Mini.

Features include text highlighting only on the audio books, automatic page turns that can be timed, and book-specific reading tips for parents to extend the book concepts. The Elmo Story Collection consists of the following titles: Tickle Me, My Name Is Elmo (audio ebook), Elmo and His Friends (audio ebook), Monsters Can Share (audio ebook), Elmo's ABC Book, Counting with Elmo and Mommy Loves Elmo.

 This app is a collaborative business venture between Sesame Street and Impelsys, who has also created the Sesame Street eBookstore, a website and app offering access 160 Sesame Street ebooks with the purchase of a subscription. The Elmo Story Collection does not require a Sesame Street eBookstore subscription and once downloaded is accessible without an Internet connection. It is powered by iPublishCentral (www.iPublishCentral.com) Names on the press release include Sameer Shariff, President of Impelsys and Jennifer A. Perry, Vice President of Worldwide Publishing for Sesame Workshop.

Details: Impelsys Inc., www.Impelsys.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 10/18/2012. [WB]

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

78%

Geography Drive USA

Fun and light hearted, the well-designed geography trivia game turns your iPad into a set of USA flash cards, drilling you on 750 bits of information. These include state abbreviations, major mountain ranges and rivers, state capitals, and so on. It uses a board-game format to let you move across the USA, unlocking each state, one at a time. Content includes nicknames, postal abbreviations, flags, symbols, rivers, mountains, parks and time zones, important trails and railroads, major cities and attractions

A question recycling feature gives you a second chance with specific questions. While the game doesn't go beyond the basic facts, it does let you customize cars and garage signs. It is possible to track and score three different players/teams, and a game-based newspaper with headlines recognizes player achievements.

Details: Spinlight Studio, http://spinlight.com/. Price: $4.99. Ages: 7-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: USA geography. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 12/9/2012. [WB]

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

88%

Go Go Games

Three well-designed and well-leveled classification games start easy, and progressively get more challenging. The games are on par with the classic Math Rabbit CD-ROMs, obviously at a fraction of the price, but fully leveraging the abilities of the multi-touch screen. The transportation theme will have a strong appeal to some children. There's a limited amount of content-- we were able to work through all the problems in about 30 minutes. The activities are solid and come out of Stanford, inspired by Pivotal Response Therapy (PRT) methods. This is described as "a behavioral intervention that uses a natural setting and intrinsic motivation to encourage a child to practice responding to increasingly complex sets of features in a way that is rewarding and fun." Don't get scared away from the fancy words -- this is a fun collection of sorting games that would be at home in any formal or informal early learning setting.

Details: Go Go Games, http://go-go-games.com/. Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: special needs, sorting, patterns. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 11/9/2012. [WB]

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

I Spy With Lola HD

This app effectively takes the common hunt-and-find play pattern down a notch by way of a series of carefully leveled challenges, clear labels and a playful theme. A hint system helps children when needed. The parents menu, cleverly hidden behind a math equation, contains options for six language options. The different locations have a geography theme such as Egypt. The paid version is worth the $2 -- there are no gimmicks or in-app purchases to worry about. Note that this is one of many in the Lola library.

Details: Beiz, www.beiz.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: classification, language, word association, vocabulary, and shape recognition.. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 11/19/2012. [WB]

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

IdentiKat

Make your own cat collage, with this beautiful, exotic creativity experience that comes directly from Torino Italy. There are two modes -- free play and build from memory. The free play mode lets you drag and drop the elements onto the screen. They can be easily resized and moved around, and it is possible to save your work. One minor problem -- throwing away a part is less than obvious. In addition, the screen orientation changes when you move between the main menu and the creativity area.

The build from memory game shows you a cat, and lets you try to rebuild it after the parts are scattered. At any time, you can take a peak at the final product, to get a clue. The best part about this app? The rich-looking materials that were inspired by "Grandma's scrap box." There are beads, felt, brooches, buttons, etc.

The app was inspired by the artwork of Italian artist Cristina Làstrego and designed and animated by professional cartoon producers. It is one of the most beautiful apps we've seen of this variety.

Details: Lastrego & Testa Multimedia S.r.l., www.lastregoetesta.it. Price: $0.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity, collage. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 1/2/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	88%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	10	
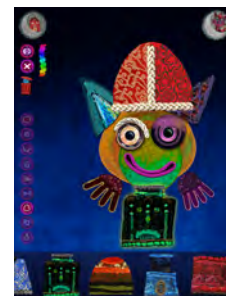
iGo Chinese: Your First Chinese Friend, Volume 1

Designed to teach beginning Chinese, this app combines a story, music and a quiz. It uses the IQChinese Type-to-Learn Methodology, that shows a keyboard, shows you a Chinese character, and asks you to type in the word. Content includes four volumes and six lessons in each volume. A story connects the lessons in every two volumes, and the story can be used as a drama play at the end of the school year to show the students' progress of language learning.

There are limited interactive features; the presentation is rather dry.

Each lesson has a story, a song, four quizzes and handwriting practice, where you fingerpaint Chinese characters. The stories are designed to teach basic vocabulary and include options to listen to the story spoken aloud and record your own voice telling the story. The quizzes employ the IQChinese 'Type-to-Learn' methodology which provides cryptic feedback as you try to type in the sounds you hear. Records are kept and can stored. Some of the menus contain strange English wording (e.g., "let's quiz" and "let's story").

Details: IQChinese Corp., www.iqchinese.com. Price: $14.99. Ages: 5-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: Chinese characters and language, handwriting. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 12/18/2012. [WB]

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

Kindergarten Reading

Nine fast-paced early reading activities do an excellent job introducing and reinforcing the first sight words, like dog, cat and zoo. The result is an excellent early reading skills activity; for home or classroom use.

The games feature Milo the Meerkat and his sidekick Puffs. Children feed and play with flamingos, monkeys and lions; collecting animals to make a zoo scene. The app teaches letter sounds for all consonants, short vowels, long vowels and consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words.

It also tracks children's progress and shows which letters have been mastered, per the Common Core State Standards. The reading curriculum was developed in cooperation with Stanford's Jennifer DiBrienza, who is also a former K-2 public school teacher; and the design shows.

Weaknesses are minor -- We wish there was a "replay" button for when the child doesn't hear the directions clearly. Example: I can not tell if the directions to finish t-?-n was tan or ten. All in all, this is an excellent early language experience, covering concepts found in any early elementary reading curriculum.

Details: Duck Duck Moose Design, www.duckduckmoosedesign.com. Price: $.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, decoding, spelling. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 12/7/2012. [WB]

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

Laloo the Red Panda

This 30 screen animated story comes with an environmental, "save an endangered species" agenda. The animal is the red panda, and the story is about how a Red Panda cub tries to survive in India. The design is limited; there are no text scaffolding features. In addition, a link to a web-based donation screen is found on the last page of the story.

Interactive features include paw prints that appear throughout story that trigger voice-over facts when tapped. As you progress through the story, you can collect bugs. Background art was inspired by famous India landmarks, including Mumbai, the Ajanta Caves, and the Taj Mahal. There are three reading options - Read to Me, Read to Myself, or Auto Play (animations and page turns are auto-played). Note: we've been told that the next release will include text highlighting and a Hindi translation.

Details: Laloo, LLC, www.laloo.us. Price: $3.99. Ages: 5-9. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, ecology, animal rescue. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 9/25/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	**72%**
Educational	7	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	8	
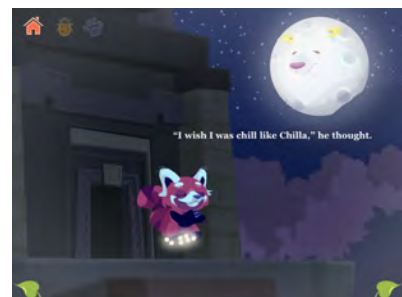
Lee Paso a Paso

This is a mostly multiple-choice style app, designed to help children learn "the basics" of Spanish. The design is clean, and it is easy to jump around if want to explore a harder level.

The app is geared to both children who speak Spanish as a first language and are just starting to read, and for kids and adults learning Spanish as a second language.

Content includes 175 images, 580 words, and mini-games using syllables to form words, matching words to pictures, completing words with missing syllables, and counting syllables in words. Options let you control the background music and sounds. The app covers 21 letters and 85 syllables (more are planned). You start by choosing a level of difficulty. In Level 1, you follow a methodology to learn step by step one letter at a time; earn prizes as you unlock each level. In Level 2 you choose which letter to practice, have a greater range of words and images to practice with. In Level 3 you can choose which game to practice, all the letters and images are presented in the game in no specific order. There is also a free lite version.

Details: BQWare, www.bqware.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: Spanish . Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 12/17/2012. [WB]

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

LittleBits

Powerful but pricey, LittleBits is a system of modular electronics that snap together with magnets. Each block, or module, has a unique function. There are several types of switches, LED lights, a light sensor, a motor and a tiny vibrating motor and more. Each part is color coded, to make it easy to quickly associate functions with colors. The result is that it is incredibly easy to "accidentally succeed" with the kits. If something doesn't fit, it simply doesn't work. The downside is that there's a much narrower range of possible outcomes, given the price.

One tester made an "annoyinator" that would flash and buzz, another made a finger pressure sensor; each part worked as expected but the limited options make LittleBits a short term option. LittleBits can be powered either by an included 9 volt battery, or your computer's USB port.

LittleBits comes in four packages that range from Teaser ($30 for one project with the LED bargraph, button cell battery, and pressure sensing switch), Starter ($90 with 10 color coded modules, a 9v battery and instructions), and Extended ($150, with 14 parts). These include a USB power cable, slide dimmer, motion trigger, roller switch, toggle switch, light trigger, fan, DC motor, buzzer, two long LEDs, a branch and two wires. Even with the most advanced kits, our testers found the possibilities to wear thin, however. For a positive first exposure to snap together circuits, LittleBits works. See http://youtu.be/6_OFav4wXHg.

Details: LittleBits Electronics, www.littlebits.cc. Price: $30-up. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: science, electricity, circuits. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 12/13/2012. [WB]

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

Mathtopia+

Fast-paced and addicting, Mathtopia provides math drills, by putting sums inside a Tetris-like game board. As new numbers drip down the screen, you match the sums as quickly as you can. When they match, the row disappears, and harder numbers fall.

You get immediate feedback, and the easy levels are easy to play, so even a beginner can have a good experience. The design also uses intermittent rewards. The app is sold in several price formats -- Mathtopia offers addition, subtraction, multiplication and division fact modules at $.99 each, or you can buy the full version (called Mathtopia+) for $3.99. There is also a free Lite version that contains beginning addition math facts. This app was written by a former State Senator (and yes, the numbers add up).

Details: Omega Labs Inc., www.topshelflearning.com. Price: $3.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: addition, subtraction, multiplication, division. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 11/21/2012. [WB]

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

My Look and Find Book

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

If you don't mind some clumsy controls, this hunt-and-find experience features wonderful illustrations from German artist Ali Mitgutsch. The goal is to explore each detailed scene, in search of specific clues, not unlike a "Where is Waldo" game. The scenes represent everyday places, such as a day in the life of an airport, zoo, or shopping mall. Ravensburger calls it a "discovery trip." The app is available in 5 languages (English, German, French, Italian and Spanish). Content includes 800 sounds and two modes: discovery trip and picture hunt.

Details: Ravensburger Digital, www.ravensburger-games.com/en/. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: classification. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 12/7/2012. [WB]

Oh the Pets You Can Get

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

Great for beginning readers, this is another solid addition to Oceanhouse Media's "The Cat in the Hat's Learning Library." If you've used any previous Oceanhouse Media titles, you're familiar with the features.

Oh the Pets You Can Get" contains factual information, presented in a playful way, to let children discover the sound and look of hundreds of common words. In the story, children help the Cat in the Hat (who is a vet) take care of cats, dogs, fish, guinea pigs and more. All information is factual.

There are two ways to read this omBook: Read to Me lets you listen to the narrated story with words highlighted as they are read; and Read it Myself lets you read the book in its traditional form. Other features include animated objects and instant glossary words; individual word highlighting (as the story is read) and words that zoom up when pictures are touched. Weaknesses include an inability to easily move around such a long book (e.g., to get to a specific page in the middle, you have to flip through every page). Visit www.seussville.com for more information.

There is no table of contents (it is not easy skip around in the story) and you can't record your own voice; a feature that is being implemented in some of the other Oceanhouse Media books.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: $3.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language, word recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 12/7/2012. [WB]

Orchestra, The

Dissect the inner workings of a working symphonic orchestra, with this well crafted, immersive musical experience.

Content includes eight carefully documented performances by the England-based Philharmonia Orchestra (http://www.philharmonia.co.uk). To make the app, cameras were placed throughout the orchestra during each performance, and key members of the orchestra were interviewed, so you can hear their thoughts about each part of each song, in real time, as it is played. In addition, as the music plays, you can watch the score scroll by.

The app contains performances of a sampling of classics designed to show off the diversity of an orchestra. These include Haydn: Symphony No., Beethoven: Symphony No. 5, Debussy: Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune, Mahler: Symphony No. 6, Stravinsky: The Firebird.

As the music plays, you can touch to explore the score of any instrument, from the perspective of the conductor. If you have no interest in music, you can view a simplified representation, with the notes shown as pitch lines.

You can explore the working of each instrument by way of traditional reading, watching videos, or hearing musicians explain their role in the orchestra. The text was written by Mark Swed, a music critic of with the LA Times. The app was created by Touch Press, in partnership with the Music Sales Group and Esa-Pekka Salonen.

Two things you need to know. This is a big app -- 1.95 GB, so the download can take a while not to mention it can fill up your iPad. It's also pricy, at $13.99. Our testers -- comprised of both musicians and non-musicians found the app amazing at first, but quickly lost interest. For music teachers or music students, this is a must have addition to your library.

Details: Touch Press, www.touchpress.com. Price: $13.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: classical music, orchestra. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 12/17/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	93%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	8	

PHLIP

PHLIP is a spatial relations puzzle where you "flip" or turn your screen left or right, like a steering wheel, to change the orientation of a set of tiles, to reassemble the picture. You start by taking a photo, or using one from your photo library. You then divide the puzzle into tiles. The more tiles, the harder the puzzle. You can lock any tile by tapping on it. The physical rotation of the device develops motor and cognitive skills and hand-eye coordination. It can also cause your heavy iPad to slip out of your hands. This is a game that works much better on an iPad Mini.

Details: Curious Hat, www.curioushat.com. Price: $0.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: logic, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 11/19/2012. [WB]

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

Red Fox at Hickory Lane

Another in the Smithsonian series of science-related apps, this app tells the story of Mother and Father Fox as they teach their four cubs to hunt, escape danger and survive on their own. Their skills are tested when a coyote appears in the distance. How will the baby cubs react? Like other Oceanhouse Media apps, children can touch any word to hear it read aloud, or an illustration to see it labeled with clear speech.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, science. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 11/16/2012. [WB]

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

Like their father, they will find food and teach their own cubs to hunt.

Rita the Lizard

We review a LOT of ebooks, but few are as beautiful as this 14 screen interactive masterpiece from Spain. Based on the print book, this eBook tells the story of a tiny lizard with an identity crises; Rita thinks she's a chameleon like her uncle William, and you must help her find herself. Each page has something interesting to discover.

There are 14 scenes and two reading modes (Read to Me and I Read and Play). Other features let you touch, drag elements, and rotate the screen. In addition, in each scene, a "secrets counter" shows you what still remains to be discovered. If you discover the secrets, you win a prize. We also liked that it was possible to record your own narration. Drawbacks include the buttons are a little small (even on the regular sized iPad); and there are self promotional links, including links to social media on the last page.

Details: Irene Blasco Studio, www.ireneblasco.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, art. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 12/17/2012. [WB]

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

Rounds: Parker Penguin

The second in the a series of non-fiction apps that deal with life-cycles, Rounds: Parker Penguin lets children participate in a G-rated version of each stage of penguin reproduction, beginning with helping a male find a female. Next comes eggs, babies and so on... The entire experience is high in child control, playfully showing children how penguins develop through their reproductive cycle, completely without embarrassment, and letting them participate by cracking the egg (with a tap) or sliding toward the ocean (by tilting the screen).

Because the app is based on three generations, you play the story three times, with different penguins (Parker, Parker's Son and Parker's Grandson), hence the word "rounds" in the title. It is similar in ways to a play with different actors using the same sets. As you explore, you discover penguin facts. Features include quality orchestrated background music that seems very relaxing. There are three reading level settings, and the text highlighting can be toggled on or off, in case you want the child to read by themselves.

The app is illustrated by Barry Tranter; narrative is written by Emma Tranter. All in all, this is an excellent new addition to the eBook genre that is worth the $4.99. See also Rounds: Franklin Frog.

Details: Nosy Crow, www.nosycrow.com. Price: $4.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: science, life cycle of penguins, biology, reproduction. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 1/5/2013. [WB]

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

There are so many penguins here, I'm glad you chose me.

Scarlet Flower Fairy Tale

Beautifully illustrated with limited text scaffolding features (e.g., there is no narration), this is a 51 screen Russian folk variation of the story of beauty and the beast, adapted from a 19th century version by Russian writer Sergey Aksakov. The app is best for older childen who are already reading.

The app features rich illustrations with some clever interactive features including: in one screen, you tilt to steer a ship through a maze; stroking a cat, flinging doors open, eating food, dragging the moon in the sky, and turning the hands on the clock. The text is small on the iPad; almost unreadable on 7 inch screens.

Details: Spider Group, www.spider.ru. Price: $3.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 12/18/2012. [WB]

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

Scribblenauts Unlimited

Now available for the both Wii U and Nintendo 3DS (as well as Windows) this edition of Scribblenauts contains more new words and related images plus a new set of challenges. The basic premise of the game is the same -- to solve puzzles by typing a word. Can't reach something high? Type "ladder" and one appears on the screen. This solves the problem, earns points and unlocks the next level. Words you type are also saved in memory, in case you need them later, to use without retyping.

The Wii U's Gamepad makes Scribblenauts much easier to type. For example, to get a cat down from a tree you type "tree" in either the touchpad or keyboard (Windows), which respond amazingly to your typing. When I typed in Car, the game produced a car. When I typed in Police, it produced a police officer. Your imagination is the limit. This makes this game one of the best, if not the best, puzzle games out there.

Our testers liked using the Wii U controller as a keyboard or sketchpad. A new multiplayer mode makes it possible for a friend to drop in and play with a friend using a Wii Remote. There's an open universe with 41 levels. The Nintendo 3DS version uses the Street Pass so you can see solutions made by other players.

Other features include an object library which lets you store old objects without the need to retype. Despite being tricky to figure out at first, this game is excellent for higher order thinking, language and spelling.

Developed by 5TH Cell for Warner Bros. See the demo, with an interview by the developer, at http://youtu.be/kHWVmF_Rajg.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: $60. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Wii U, Nintendo 3DS, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: language, creativity, spelling, writing, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 6/20/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	90%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	
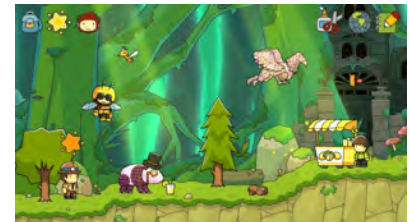
Silverlit Interactive Bluetooth R/C Porsche 911 Carrera

Realistic looking, but hard to control, this R/C Porsche 911 Carrera lets you use your iPod Touch, iPhone, or iPad as your remote control.

The car measures 11" x 4.5" x 3.5" and requires 4 AA batteries (included) and a battery indicator shows your vehicle's battery level. You start by downloading the free Silverlit Interactive Bluetooth app. Next you turn on the car, start the app, and go into your iOS settings panel to find the car's Bluetooth signal. You can then use your device to drive, either by way of virtual joystics, or by tilting to accelerate forward or backward. You can also control the car's headlights, tail lights and turn signals, as well as beep the horn. Other cars include a Enzo Ferrari and a Mercedes-Benz SLS AMG ($129, that we did not test) that lets you remotely control the Gullwing Doors, program your car to react to your music, and stream your iTunes music from your iDevice into your car.

Details: Silverlit, www.silverlit.com. Price: $80. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: r/c car. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.4 stars. Entry date: 12/14/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	6	68%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	7	

Sneaky Sam

Ready for a charming story from Australia? Featuring colorful illustrations by Australian Binny Talib (www.binny.com.au), this 11 screen story is about a boy who likes to cause mischief by spraying a cat with a hose, making mud prints in the house, and so on. While the story is fairly mundane, the illustrations are clear and playful and the design isn't too bad. We liked how each is presented in a clever "building" mechanic, where each element is layered over the next. Scaffolding includes the ability to touch a sentence to hear it read out loud. There is no individual word scaffolding. There are three activities that are hardly novel, but help to expand the story.

Details: Sneaky Sam Productions, http://sneakysam.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 12/9/2012. [WB]

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

84%

Thinkin' Things 1: Toony the Loon's Lagoon

Sometimes an old classic doesn't translate so well to an iPad or Android Tablet. Case in point, one of our old favorites -- Thinkin' Things.

Back in the days of mono-touch and non-HD graphics, Thinkin' Things was cutting edge. The first edition scored 5 stars back in 1993; one of the first and few software titles to get such a rating. That rating has dropped significantly in the context of the multi-touch tablet age. But the result is a large border around a reduced play area; and hot spots that are tiny especially on the iPad Mini.

While the activities are still the same, the designers directly ported the graphics to the iPad, replacing the cursor with your finger. In doing so, they kept the resolution the same but reduced the size. This seems logical, after all who wants fuzzy graphics? Children who have come to expect multi-touch will find the experience lacking as well. The six activities are the same as they were in 1993; presenting a case study in good design. As they play, kids will compare and contrast, hypothesize and test rules, create and discern patterns, and analyze and predict.

If this sounds too much like all work and no play, don't worry. The program is loads of fun to fool around with and very educational as well. For example, kids can build their auditory and visual memory skills as they repeat musical patterns. In this game children are given the opportunity to create their own melodies as well. Another activity lets kids learn about attributes, differences and patterns as they create special birds according to orders. A matching game has children comparing and recognizing relationships as they try to pair the right jungle guide to the appropriate jungle adventurer.

Each activity has both open-ended and goal-directed elements, allowing for exploration and experimentation. There are still hundreds of problems to solve, with dozens of self-adjusting skill levels. Of special note -- the "grow slides" that let a child change the difficulty level on the fly. For $8.99 however,   an old app built on yesterday's technology no longer passes.

Details: Software MacKiev, www.mackiev.com. Price: $8.99. Ages: 4-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic, math, patterns, memory, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 1/6/2013. [WB]

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

80%

Thomas's Travel in Bookland

Beautiful art and music meets slow interaction that feels cut-and-pasted. The original story has some dark moments. Thomas, a young boy, finds himself locked in the library where he meets Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf, Alice and other famous children's literature characters. The book is available in two languages, English and French. There are direct links to social media on the last page.

Details: La Souris Qui Raconte, www.lasourisquiraconte.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.3 stars. Entry date: 7/17/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	4	46%
Educational	5	
Entertaining	4	
Design Features	5	
Good Value	5	

Toca Hair Salon 2

This second edition of Toca Hair Salon is just as zany, with some added frosting that makes it more fun. The app is more similar than different than the first edition, however. The biggest news is that this is the first Toca Boca app to run on the Amazon Kindle Fire HD, the first Toca Boca app to break free of iTunes. We were not able to find the app in Google Play, however.

New tools include a razor, curling iron, crimper and straightener. New accessories include hats and glasses. Additional content includes a wider range of color spray effects, the ability to combine to customize new shades, and new photo backdrops.

As with all Toca Boca digital toys, there are no in-app purchases or third-party ads. This app is definitely more fun than educational; once children get started, it is hard to stop. Children can take photos of their final creations, which end up in your photo library. It's always nice to see a great app get better; such is the case with Toca Hair Salon 2.

Details: Toca Boca, http://tocaboca.com/. Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, Kindle Fire. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, hair styling. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 12/7/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	10	96%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	10	

Toddler Maze 123

Here's a great starter app for introducing even young children to the mechanics of a multi-touch screen. Content consists of 20 simple mazes, shown in sequence as stops along a road. You can drive an ambulance to the hospital, fly a spaceship to the moon or walk through a sewer system with a friendly alligator. The illustrations, characters and animated objects are well designed and work well with the overall theme. Features include: multiple levels of difficulty; a sound on/off feature: optional hints that can show the track of the path: the ability to change the printed instructions; and a printing feature, so you could play the mazes off-line. One minor gripe -- it would be nice if children could see the trail of their finger. All in all, this is an excellent app for younger children that provides a solid spatial learning experience.

Details: GiggleUp Pty Ltd, www.giggleup.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 11/20/2012. [WB]

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

Toontastic Jr. Pirates

Toontastic Jr. is a simplified and limited iPad or iPhone puppet-making experience that comes with a built in pirate theme.

It locks you into a three-scene template, where you are given an introduction and then asked "what happened next" and are given the chance to provide your own ending as you record your voice. If you're in the mood to make a three-scene pirate move with eight-musical moods and a monkey, you'll love Toontastic Jr.

But if you want to integrate more of your own ideas, make the characters move a certain way, or put in your own photos; or if you want to quickly make your own quick cartoon, you're out of luck. The program forces you to fill up the provided template.

A new StoryShare feature makes it possible to co-create stories, but it also pastes this message: "I have this AWESOME app called Toontastic Jr." onto the email.

The interface is well designed, and simple to use, but it also traps you by not including the ability to pause or return to the main menu. They say that creativity thrives on structure, but not if there's too much structure.

Details: Launchpad Toys, http://launchpadtoys.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, animation, puppets. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.7 stars. Entry date: 11/28/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	7	74%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	7	

This section contains a listing of products in the process of being reviewed, but not yet rated. We also include significant updates of older products.

Dance Central 3

The third game in the Dance Central series, this title features a new multiplayer mode for up to eight players and a soundtrack with songs by Usher, Cobra Starship, Gloria Gaynor and 50 Cent.

Dances include The Hustle, Electric Slide, and The Dougie and a new "Crew Throwdown" mode lets two teams of up to four dancers dance against one another. The Crew Throwdown mode contains a freeform Keep the Beat mini-game, in which dancers earn points based on the rhythm of their movements, and Make Your Move, which challenges dancers to invent their own dance moves, then compete to see who can master a routine created on the spot.

A Party mode lets players drop in and out, and a Rehearse practice mode lets you learn the game's original choreography, step by step. Other features include 40 songs; an in-game Music Store; voice commands; and a companion app that lets you control play lists by way of Xbox LIVE. Developed by Harmonix Music Systems for Microsoft.

Details: Microsoft Games (Xbox Division), . Price: $50. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: dancing, gross motor development, music. Entry date: 6/12/2012.

Fuze Wheel Writer

Back in the olden days, kids used to clip baseball cards to their bicycle spokes, to achieve a motor sound. The Fuze Wheel Writer is an accessory for your bicycle tire (20" inches or larger) that displays visual light effects using the motion of your bike wheel as you ride. As the wheel turns, LEDs flash on and off to create up to twelve light patterns that look better -- of course -- at night than at day. It can also display your current speed, turning your bike wheel into a giant speedometer.

The Wheel Writers are water resistant and battery powered (three AAAs) with an automatic battery shut off.

Details: Skyrocket Toys LLC, http://skyrockettoys.com/. Price: $20. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: smart toy. Entry date: 11/7/2012.

How My Body Works

This app uses 3D male and female models to guide users on an interactive journey through the human body, exploring the body's systems and organs. The app is based on the book and television franchise. Children travel to each layer of anatomically correct male and female bodies, learning about each of the body's system's through educational videos, animations and text.

Features include: anatomically correct 3D models that let you rotate, zoom, and explore the different levels of the human body; 248 hotspots located on navigable 3D model; 315 illustrations in HD featuring scientific insights; 100 animations that explain the function of different items within the body; and a range of cartoons and interactive games designed to teach readers about the body. There are eight information packs available. You can download the app, including the 3D models and the first information pack - the Sensory System - for free. Additional packs are available for $1.99 each. The bundle, available for $9.99, contains all eight information packs.

Details: DeAgostini, www.deagostiniusa.com. Price: $9.99. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: anatomy, biology. Entry date: 9/5/2012.

LEGO MINDSTORMS EV3

Among the new technologies announced this week, a long awaited upgrade to LEGO Mindstorms -- the DIY Robotics kit that brings snap together robots into the hands of "the rest of us." The upgraded brain inside the kit is the LEGO Mindstorms EV3 ($350, www. LEGOeducation.us/mindstorms). About the size of a bar of soap and powered by 6 AA batteries, the controller comes with the promise of smarter, faster, more sophisticated DIY robots. A new app component makes it possible to use your smartphone or tablet to dole out instructions, or control your robot using a bluetooth connection.

The EV3 is part of a kit, consisting of sensors, wires, gears, motors and apps. The price doesn't include a Mac or Windows computer, used to write programs. The entire concept represents the continuation of the philosophical marriage between LEGO and the similarly named programming language, Lego that originally started 30 years ago when LEGO's Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen contacted MIT's Seymour Papert following the publication of his book Mindstorms in which he espoused the use of Turtle programming to further constructivist learning.

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

LEGO MINDSTORMS EV3 is an attempt to add some new power and spice to an old idea. Besides more raw computing power (a Linux-based ARM9 processor, with 16 MB of memory plus 64 MB of storage that is quite a step up from the original 512K), there are also ports for SD expansion and a USB connection to a Mac or Windows computer.

Builders will find eight ports -- four input and four output plus speakers, bluetooth, and the ability to work with either iOS or Android tablets.

The starter kit includes Servo motors, a touch sensor, and an IR "seeker sensor" that can measure distance or detect objects. There's an IR Beacon that can remotely control the robot from up to 6 feet away, and a color sensor, so you could make a robot with the ability to, say, follow a red line. The new kit is backward compatible with LEGO Mindstorms NXT and 594 LEGO TECHNIC elements, and the programming software is PC and Mac compatible, with icon-based drag and drop environment for "building" programs with new interactive content that helps de-bug programming. The screen I saw reminded me of Scratch.

LEGO has also attempted to make your out of the box experience a little less intimidating, with instructions for building 17 robots that will work within 20 minutes. The kits can work with LEGO Technic pieces, additional motors or sensors to change the functionality of the robot.

A "mission pad" can be used in a series of obstacle courses, and an app provides 3D building instructions, through collaboration with Autodesk. The new 3D instructions app allows builders to zoom in and rotate each step in the building process, making it easier than ever to assemble even the most sophisticated robot. LEGO MINDSTORMS EV3 will be available in stores in the second half of 2013.

Details: LEGO Americas, www.lego.com. Price: $350. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android, Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: math, logic, programming, creativity, STEM. Entry date: 1/6/2013.

Mermaid Waters

Designed to teach math, the free, lite version of this app features four mini games that spoon feed you math facts. The full version, available as an in-app purchase, features more challenging levels, 10 narrated story clips and 30 story characters.

The app also features interactive stickers and progress reporting for parents. Game instructions are available in six languages (English, French, German, Mandarin, Japanese, Spanish). If you download the free version, be careful because children are exposed to in-app sales.

Details: Stickery Pte. Ltd., http://stickeryapp.com/. Price: $free/ $2.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: math. Entry date: 5/24/2012.
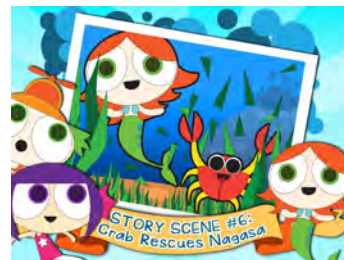
Moshi Monsters Moshlings Theme Park

The follow-up to Moshi Monsters: Moshling Zoo (CTR December 2011), this Nintendo DS game lets you explore locations as you work to rebuild the Moshlings Theme Park.

You can uncover secret codes online at MoshiMonster.com, which will unlock areas that you can explore on both the Nintendo DS and 3DS systems. When you achieve high scores in the DS game, you can also unlock content online.

Players of the 3DS version can interact with other 3DS players via the StreetPass feature and play games to bring the Moshlings to life. Content includes 60 Moshling characters including a new Moshling named Furnando. The game inlcudes a week trial to MoshiMonsters.com and a redeemable code you can use to interact with your new Moshling on the Moshi website. Created for Activision by Black Lantern Studios.

Details: Activision, Inc., www.activision.com. Price: $30. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Nintendo DS, Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: virtual worlds. Entry date: 11/27/2012.

Nexus 7

Nexus 7 is one of three from the Nexus family. See also the phone-sized Nexus 4 and the iPad-sized Nexus 10. The 16 GB version of the Nexus 7 costs $200, but factor in $20 for the case. It can run "over 700,000 titles" in Google Play; far fewer than the Apple iOS; but still... how many apps do you need? Nexus 7 works with Google's cloud services – so your contacts, Gmail, Calendar, photos, music, movies, and books can be backed up in the cloud, no wires needed. The screen is clear and responsive. Made by Asus for Google (the company that owns the Android operating system. See http://www.google.com/nexus/

Details: Google, . Price: $200. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: an Android tablet for children. Entry date: 11/21/2012.

Pajanimals, The: Light In The Sky

This app brings the Jim Henson Company/Sprout TV show to your iPad or iPod Touch. The Pajanimals - CowBella, Apollo, Sweetpea Sue, and Squacky - are four friends who snuggle to sing songs to their preschool friends. In the story, Squacky becomes afraid after hiding in a dark closet during a game of hide and seek. His imagination gets the better of him and now it's up to Apollo, Sweetpea Sue, CowBella and you to put Squacky's mind at ease.

The app lets you play, sing and dance along, play hide and seek, play concentration and launch a rocket ship to the moon. You can also discover all the toys to play with in the Pajanimals rooms, then help the Pajanimals brush their teeth and get ready for bed. The Sing-A-Long feature uses voiceovers and songs from the show and rhythmic touch screen games, allowing you to play along with "Pajamarama Bounce" and "Night Sky" and watch as objects in the environment spring to life.

Details: N-Fusion Interactive, www.n-fusion.com. Price: $4.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: . Entry date: 11/27/2012.

Sports Champions 2

The follow-up to 2010's Sports Champions (CTR October 2010), this game contains five new sporting events: Skiing, Boxing, Table Tennis, Golf, and Bowling, as well as an updated Archery game. You start by choosing an avatar, and then choose your game. Using the PlayStation Move motion controller and PlayStation Eye camera, you can mimic actions such as throwing a knockout punch or swinging a tennis racket. The game lets you play with one or two Move controllers so you can play alone or challenge a friend. Other features include: personalize tournaments with Party Play; fully customize your character's look and style as well as the sound and animation; unlockables including new clothing, equipment and accessories; beginner friendly controls that will no longer require the need to calibrate for pick-up-and-play action; and full stereoscopic 3D support. Developed by Zindagi Games for Sony.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc., www.us.playstation.com. Price: $40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, PlayStation Move. Teaches/Purpose: sports, hand-eye coordination. Entry date: 11/27/2012.

Word Families - My Backpack

Designed to teach children to read accurately, rapidly and with comprehension, this app features nine word families with more than 50 words, and is based upon five components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness (word families): phonics (blends): fluency: vocabulary: and comprehension.

Children must find the correct beginning sound to match the picture with the word family, then tap the right letter to spell the correct word that corresponds with the picture. When they have chosen the correct letter, the app makes a clapping sound and repeats the word aloud. Next, the app goes through all the pictures for the word family and returns all related pictures for that word family. Here, kids find a great informal assessment for their reading development. After completing all these activities, the app goes to the next word family.

Features include: informal assessments for children; word family practice words; picture/word association (words are spoken aloud when touched); words related to a particular word family with their pictures are shown to kids for reading on every level; and professional audio narration.

Details: Rave Infosys Inc., http://www.raveinfosys.com/portfolio/mobile-application/word-families/. Price: $1.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: reading, phonics. Entry date: 5/23/2012.

Zombie Kids

Developed by a math teacher, Zombie Kids is designed to give children math practice with word problems. In the story, John, a third grade genius, begins to suspect that something is wrong with the kids in his elementary school. The students behave strangely when the teachers are around, and one day John follows a student into the teachers lounge and discovers a frightening secret. Children will join John as he tries to save the school. Features of the app include: six chapters; a home-made musical score; movable illustrations; multiple choice answers; and sound effects. Content includes five short chapters with problems such as "if Timid Ted disappeared 2 weeks and 3 days ago, how many days has he been missing for?" To get to the next page, you need to enter the correct answer. Sound can be turned off on each page. The illustrations are colorful but crude; and the story themes deal with farts, smells and junk food, giving this a bit of an edge. Note that the latest version is buggy and freezes. Download with caution, if at all.

Details: Zombie Kids, www.zombiekids.net. Price: $2.99. Ages: 7-10. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math, reading, word problems, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division. Entry date: 10/18/2012.