

The Educational Guide to Software, Electronic Toys, Video Games & Web Sites



Children's TECHNOLOGY

www.childrensoftware.com *Review*™

September 2008
Volume 16, No. 9, Issue 102

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Back to School with

Giggles (page 7)

Plus TimeLiner XE (p. 12), LittleClickers:
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(p. 7), Mario Super Sluggers (p. 8) and
much much more....

My Back to School Technology Checklist

This year, as school approaches, something miraculous happened in our house. My two teenage daughters developed an interest in doing laundry. Besides the washing machine, what other technology is needed for back to school tasks, like homework? Of course that depends on the age of your child. For a general age by age general roundup, see my column in last week's PARADE magazine at



Warren Buckleitner

http://www.parade.com/articles/editions/2008/edition_08-24-2008/Parade_Picks.

For our home, with my daughters in middle and high school and me teaching a class at Rutgers, our home technology needs have increased this Fall. Here are the essential technology items on our Back to School checklist.

1. **Google.** We each use it continually, along with Facebook.com, fanfiction.com, moodle and others.
2. **Something to see Google on.** Both daughters are old enough (13 and 16) to have their own Toshiba Satellites (about \$700 each, from www.jr.com) running Vista, with 2 GB of RAM. We gather around a large (19") iMac near the kitchen for editing videos, checking weather and class projects. Connected to the "big Mac" is a Canon ZR 800 mini-DV camcorder, a 500 MB hard drive for backups. I use a MacBook.
3. **Something to get Google to the computers.** We pay \$40/month for DSL service from Embarq and a wireless router in the basement that can reach every corner of the house.
4. **Something to print papers.** We have two printers on our network -- a low cost Brother laser printer (\$230, www.tigerdirect.com) and an HP 6980 Inkjet (\$160 from Staples). The Brother is used for longer black and white papers, the HP for color covers or just in case the Brother jams on a deadline. We buy ink from our local Cartridge World franchise (www.cartridgeworld.com).
5. **Software for writing.** The girls use Microsoft Works on their Toshibas but often finish and fine-tune projects on the big Mac, which has a copy of Microsoft Office (including PowerPoint and Excel). We added a USB hub so you don't have to keep reaching in back to plug in a Flash drive. Each of us has our own folder for storing our "stuff."
6. **The Pulse Smartpen** (www.livescribe.com). When my oldest daughter heads off to college, she'll take one with her. I use one every day for taking notes and recording my Rutgers lectures.
7. **A 55 gallon drum** of hair conditioner.

At a Glance: Lessons in This Issue

At CTR, we say "The Software Tells the Story." Here are some of the key findings in this issue.

- The new Eyeclips microscope has great features but the controls are hard to use.
- TimeLiner XE is good, but expensive, and if you have a toddler, get Giggles.
- There's a free Flash-based game **Hurricane Katrina: Tempest in Crescent City**, at www.globalkids.org that is worth a second look.
- Nintendo keeps hitting homeruns with amazing new titles like **Mario Super Sluggers** for the Wii.
- Tag has a competitor (Poingo) that looks good, but isn't nearly as smart.
- The games on Leapfrog's **didj** are addicting and it is easy to use.
- Wind Turbines are amazing, and they rarely kill birds. Learn more on p. 4.



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- We don't distribute/trade or sell subscriber information.
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An inside view of the Mediatech Foundation, where we test and archive our software. Visit <http://www.mediatech.org> for more information.



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EyeClops BioniCam, www.jakkspecific.com
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Hurricane Katrina: Tempest in Crescent City, www.globalkids.org
Know Your USA 1.5, www.knowyourusa.net
Mario Super Sluggers, www.nintendo.com
Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution (DS), www.take2games.com
Stylin' Studio, www.mattel.com
TimeLiner XE, www.tomsnyder.com

IN THE NEXT ISSUE...

As we go to press, we're testing the titles below for next month. Have you used them?

We welcome feedback:

lisa@childrenssoftware.com

Deer Drive	Madden NFL 09
didj: Indiana Jones	miJam Laser Light Show
Disney Fairies Pixie	Mission in Space
Hollow Toys	miTech P.C. Gizmo
FurReal Friends: Biscuit	My Dress-Up
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Guitar Hero World Tour	Naked Brothers Band,
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Huru Humi	National Geographic
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Photography	
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The Enercon E-126 has blades that are nearly as long as the wings of a Boeing 747 (63 meters long vs. 68 meters long). Photo from www.treehugger.com

Test your knowledge of Giant Wind Turbines

Wind energy is getting a lot more attention lately. In fact, some people hope that wind turbines will someday be able to generate enough electricity to power homes. Here are facts about these amazing inventions.

1. What country had the first windmills?

- a) USA b) China c) Iran d) Holland

At <http://www.eia.doe.gov/kids/energyfacts/sources/renewable/wind.html>

you learn that the earliest known windmills were in Persia, which today is called Iran (c). These early windmills looked like large paddle wheels. Centuries later, the people of Holland improved the basic design of the windmill. They gave it propeller-type blades to pump water or to “mill” (grind) grain to make flour.

2. True or false. Do the giant blades of a turbine kill birds?

At <http://www.technologyreview.com/Energy/18167/> you learn that yes, birds can fly into the blades and die. But mostly, researchers have discovered that birds tend to stay far away from the large turbines. At <http://www.currykerlinger.com/birds.htm> you learn that many more birds are killed from glass windows and house cats.

3. How many homes can the largest wind generator in the world provide power for?

- a) 10 b) 500 c) 5,000 d) 500,000

At <http://www.metaefficient.com/news/new-record-worlds-largest-wind-turbine-7-megawatts.html> you learn about the giant Enercon E-126 (pictured to the left). Located in Germany it has been called the largest wind turbine in the world, with the ability to produce enough electricity for a town with 5,000 houses, each with four people.

4. True or false. Do giant wind turbines make a loud noise?

Well, some people say true, and other people say false. The best way to decide is to listen yourself, by watching this YouTube video made by a guy standing under a large wind turbine with spinning blades.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAguBdkmRtY&feature=related>

5. What country leads the world in wind power?

- a) USA b) China c) Germany d) Australia

According to <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4944046.stm> Europe has much greater public acceptance of the concept of wind energy, and a lot of breezy days. Currently, Germany leads the world in wind power generation, with the biggest wind turbine and the largest number of wind farms. The USA is in second place but that gap is narrowing. One thing for sure, with the rising cost of energy, we'll probably be seeing more giant wind turbines on top of hillsides -- perhaps in your own home town!

Want to see a wind turbine explode? Of course you do. Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nSB1SdVHqQ>

Windmill/Wind Turbine Explosion



The ALTurbine



Resources for teachers

Kidwind (www.kidwind.org) is an online catalog of wind power kits that was created by a 6th grade teacher named Michael Arquin, and it has turned into a thriving business. For about \$90, you get a kit called the ALTurbine that includes different blades, small generators that can charge batteries or power LEDs, gears, a small pump and power capacitors. The site includes lesson plans.



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Feature Reviews

SEPTEMBER 1, 2008

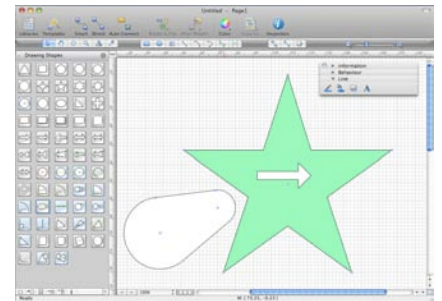
Here's an alphabetical listing of new products, along with a full review, ratings and tester feedback. The "Entry Date" refers to the date we first learned of the product.

ConceptDraw 7

Need to make a flowchart? Designed for professionals in search of a fast way to make vector-based graphics for drawings or presentations, this diagramming and drawing tool might make a viable alternative to Adobe Illustrator. It is certainly much easier to use. Using a collection of clip art, you can drag, drop or stretch designs, or create lines to represent their relationships. Other features include: collections of pre-drawn library shapes; WYSIWYG text and graphics; export to graphics formats; and cross platform compatibility of features and files with Windows and Macintosh. If you need to make a floorplan or add some spice to a presentation, this is a viable consideration. Prices are \$249 for a single user, \$1120 for 5 users, and \$1995 for 10 users. The program takes 800 MB of hard disk space for full installation, and requires registration.

Details: CS Odessa LLC, www.conceptdraw.com. Price: \$299/single user. Ages: 12-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: planning, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 5/29/2008. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	85%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	



didj: Star Wars The Clone Wars

Following a tried-and-true formula of mixing multiple-choice workbook problems in an arcade-style side-scrolling game, this cartridge is both fun and responsive. In many ways, the didj resembles a typical Game Boy Advance experience, with smooth controls and clear graphics. Because children can choose their grade level at the start of the game (a standard didj feature), the problems match a child's level. In this particular game, children use the direction keys to move through a variety of gradually more challenging levels, set in a Star Wars theme, with Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker. You jump, fight, and shoot your way through each level in order to stop the evil plans, with frequent pauses for a set of math facts. Note that these are not "higher level" types of math experiences; instead, they more closely resemble a worksheet. But the fact that they are leveled and that children get instant feedback on their progress is a plus. As any teacher will tell you, a little sugar, or in this case some Star Wars fighting, helps the medicine go down.

Details: LeapFrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$24. Ages: 6-9. Platform: didj gaming system. Teaches/Purpose: geometry, fractions, place value.. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 8/20/2008. [WB]

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



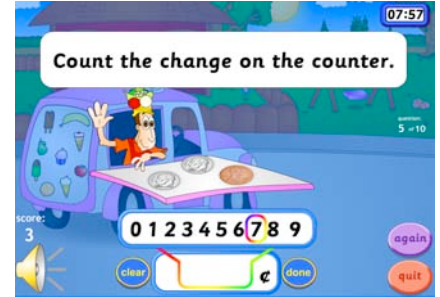


Education City (www.educationcity.com)

Easy to use but scripted and didactic, this web delivers math, science and reading curriculum (for K-5 students) and has excellent child tracking and record keeping features. There's also a nice variety of activities that could be useful as a supplement to an existing curriculum. The only drawback--in our opinion--is that the pedagogy is too stilted, and the reinforcements too excessive and not skippable. A better teaching style would have resulted in much better ratings. The assessment system, called success tracker, shows the problem and your answer. Content covers Language Arts, Math and Science for K-5. Education City was originally created in the UK, and is recently being exported to the US. Designed for school use, although there is no reason each child can't have their own password and screen name and log in from home.

Details: EducationCity.com, www.educationcity.com. Price: \$400 and up. Ages: 5-11. Platform: Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: math, reading, science. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 8/21/2008. [WB]

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



EyeClops BioniCam

Want to see something scary? Hold the EyeClops BioniCam--this year's edition of the TV microscope--up to your arm. A single hair looks like a stalk of asparagus, and your skin might look like an elephant's--depending on your age.

Still powerful but with an added layer of complexity, BioniCam has three new features. There are three magnification levels (100x, 200x, and 400x), an onboard 2.5 inch color LCD screen, and a USB port, which lets you store recorded images (.jpg) or movies, as .avi files, for viewing on a computer. Science teachers, make a note of this new feature. Now it is easy to pull the swimming paramecium right into your PPT presentation!

A separate AV cable is included that lets you plug the microscope into the AV jack of your TV. It's this latter use that has the most power, especially when used with a projector.

Unfortunately, the price of the new features is added complexity, which is a major consideration for classroom use. The new eight button control console is befuddling at best--moving in and out of modes is akin to the worst type of TV remote (last year's edition has just one button, for on/off). Our testers became so frustrated they had to turn the unit off, and back on again, in order to simply see things on the screen. In addition, they noted that the screen looked too dim on the higher magnification settings, despite a fresh set of five AA batteries and playing with the preferences settings. That said, after about 15 minutes of practice, you can become pretty adept with the controls, which is well worth the trouble given the new features that this microscope provides.

Additional accessories include a Bug Vac that lets your child collect small insects in a chamber that can be attached to it (\$15) and an Activity Pack with posters and maps that your child can explore to find hidden pictures, riddles and micro-printed clues (\$8). The bottom line: if you want to capture movies or pictures on your computer screen, get this edition. But if you simply want to display sharp, clear images on your TV or screen, stick with last year's EyeClops and save the money.

Details: Jakks Pacific, Inc., www.jakkspacific.com. Price: \$80. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, TV. Teaches/Purpose: science, observation, exploration. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 1/11/2008. [WB]

Ease of Use	6	86%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	





Giggles: Computer Funtime for Baby - Nursery Rhymes

If you share a home with babies or toddlers, you can't go wrong with the computerized busy box. The fourth title in the Giggles CD-ROM series for Mac or Windows computers, each title allows babies or toddlers (or adults) to merely bang on any key or move the mouse to get a theme-related graphic or sound. This "accidental success" experience not only keeps children busy, but creates a feeling of empowerment that never gets stale. In addition, the strong linkage between action and label qualifies it as an effective emergent literacy experience, in our opinion (this might easily be debated among scholars).

Content in this edition includes 10 nursery rhyme themed playgrounds including Jack and Jill, Hey Diddle Diddle, and Mary Had A Little Lamb. Each activity is an animated visual representation of the nursery rhyme so that your child can interact with it by pressing keys. For example, in Jack and Jill, each key press will lead Jack and Jill farther up the hill. In Humpty Dumpty, every key press (it doesn't matter) makes Humpty Dumpty start to lose his balance. As children play, parents can toggle between five musical styles; or opt to turn the music off. In all cases, the music and graphics are high quality, which is a big plus to this program. In addition, the words for each rhyme can be viewed on-screen.

The program contains 50 songs, as well as the songs for each nursery rhyme. It also features two modes: Baby Mode for ages six to 24 months, and Toddler Mode for ages 24 to 36 months. The bottom line? You can't go wrong with this new addition to the Giggles line, as long as you don't mind a little applesauce on the keyboard.

Details: Leveractive, LLC, www.giggles.net. Price: \$20. Ages: 0-3. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: causality, early learning. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 7/16/2008. [WB]

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

98%



Hurricane Katrina: Tempest in Crescent City

How many people can you save from a hurricane? This free sidescrolling game is a far cry from Super Mario, but it is easy to play and has a valuable educational message.

You use the arrow keys to steer a young girl through a flooding neighborhood in a timed race to try to save as many residents as possible. You use the arrow keys to move, and the space bar to jump, take a breath, or break a hole in a roof. Reading the cartoon-like text bubbles is required in order to understand the next challenge. The Flash-based game runs in any recent browser, and requires a registration. The game was developed by Global Kids (<http://www.globalkids.org>) who worked with Game Pill (<http://www.digitalcreations.com>), with funding from AMD and Microsoft. The site provides links to a variety of relief groups as well as information about New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina including multiple timelines, analysis of media coverage, and supporting articles for all information presented. This is a good game for teachers to bookmark, and you certainly can't argue with the price.

Details: Global Kids, www.globalkids.org. Price: \$free. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: social studies, hurricane relief. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 8/28/2008. [WB]

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

86%



Imagination Station

There's not very much "imagination" to be found in this computer-delivered K-3 reading curriculum. A better name would be "direct reading instruction station." The program is delivered by CD-ROM (by installing a core program on a Windows or Mac computer) and managed online.

The lessons are flash-based and are, according to one reviewer's notes, "frighteningly didactic." For example, when reading a book, children are not allowed to turn the page too soon, as judged by a hidden timer. The lessons are thick with instructions and light on opportunities to play with the ideas. Some of the application games--on the other hand--are much more fun. For example, there's a word-matching game where you must throw basketballs at target words as fast as possible.

The quality of the graphics is pixelated in places, and the stories tend to be dry--based around reading level rather than an interesting idea. Note that there is a lot of content that we did not consider. The fact that the lessons are individualized and that every child is individually assessed, is a big plus to this type of approach. In order to get a higher rating, the lessons would have to be much better constructed, and higher in feelings of child control.

Details: iStation, www.istation.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 5-8. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: early reading, letter recognition, comprehension. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.9 stars. Entry date: 4/8/2005. [WB]

Ease of Use	10
Educational	7
Entertaining	2
Design Features	4
Good Value	N

58%





Know Your USA 1.5

Designed in--of all places--Ireland, this US geography facts quiz is available as a 12.1 MB download for Windows computers. Version 1.5, released Summer of 2008, includes more content (60 photos, better maps of each state with more details, better puzzles, and a direct link to both Google Earth and the Wikipedia entry on the United States). Of course, this last feature could be both either a strength or a weakness--depending on your view of Wikipedia, not to mention the required Internet connection.

With these new tweaks, the program provides a straightforward and effective way to practice geography facts by way of a series of lessons and timed quizzes. For example, in the State Capitals section, students can explore the answers by simply rolling the mouse around the screen which, in turn, pops-up the name of each state's capital city. In the Quickfire quiz, a capital is named, and students must select the right state. Unfortunately, the interaction is clunky--students must click "OK" to continue to the next question, which gets repetitive.

The next step is Exam, where they must type the name of the capital. Individual student progress is stored on your hard drive, providing students sign in. There is no use limit as to the number of students, making this a viable consideration for elementary or middle school classroom use.

Other topics include regions, states, state capitals, major cities, rivers, mountains and lakes. There is also a states jigsaw puzzle. If you are looking for clean, affordable geography practice, this is a good choice. Note that the developer's previous titles include Know Your Ireland and Know Your Europe. A "Know Your Earth" is planned. You can download a seven-day trial version, and purchase a download key if you like the program. The School version, for unlimited use, costs \$300.

Details: EdWare Interactive Learning, www.knowyourusa.net. Price: \$25. Ages: 8-14. Platform: Windows XP. Teaches/Purpose: US Geography, states, capitals, land features. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 5/25/2006. [WB]

Mario Super Sluggers

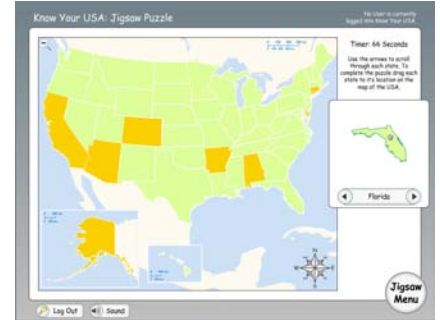
Fun but expensive, our testers went wild for this wacky baseball game for 1-4 players. You first grab your bat (Wii Remote) and step up to bat as one of 40 Nintendo characters (or your Mii), in this playful fantasy baseball game. The Wii Remote controller is used to swing the bat; or you make a throwing motion to pitch. The single-player mode takes place in Baseball Kingdom, where you encounter characters with different baseball skills. For example, Mario has a fireball, while Luigi can turn infield hits into a tornado.

Some players play better together than others, and different character combinations result in good chemistry for a team. In the multiplayer mode, up to four people compete at once. If you're looking for a realistic baseball sim, this isn't the game. But if you don't mind a bit of vintage Nintendo craziness, this is a great choice. More information is at www.MarioSuperSluggers.com.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: sports, baseball, gross motor development (timing), temporal relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 8/25/2008. [WB]

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

90%



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

95%

ESRB Rating: Everyone, Comic Mischief





ME2 (www.me2universe.com)

Marketed on the notion that our kids are all turning into couch potatoes, ME2, which means "my electronic double" is both a key to an online world, and a motion sensor. Shaped like a bar of soap, the handheld component is equipped with "tri-axis" motion sensors, designed to count vertical, horizontal and diagonal movements. When the device is plugged into your computer, the count is converted into steps in the game, giving you more time to explore the vast 3D mazes. So, a child could clip the thing to a belt, run a marathon, and come back with more time. While this sounds good, the same result could come from clipping the toy onto your dog or hiring your little sister. The handheld device also contains a game of Bejeweled and Tetris.

The computer component, which loads in a Microsoft Explorer ActiveX window (providing you override the warnings) lets you first create an avatar (hair, skin, eye color and so on) along with a name and password. Next, you can start running around a series of confusing mazes collecting diamonds, which seem to have no other purpose than to keep you moving. If you want to buy something by cashing in your diamonds, you can clip on your ME2, shake it a few hundred times, and charge up your bank account. While the idea is worthy, the quality of the game is clunky at best, and at times frustrating.

Other features include the ability to download new content to your handheld unit. The ME2 features a tiny 256-color screen, with a clock, alarm and timer, sound effects, and a USB cable for connecting to your computer. The three AAA batteries are not included.

Details: iToys Inc., www.me2universe.com. Price: \$35. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: physical activity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.7 stars. Entry date: 8/12/2008. [WB]

Ease of Use	6
Educational	5
Entertaining	7
Design Features	3
Good Value	6

54%



Mega Man Star Force 2: Zerker X Saurian

The latest Mega Man game from Capcom is a direct sequel to Mega Man Starforce, and is the spiritual successor to the Mega Man Battle Network series.

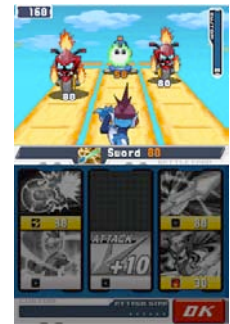
The game picks up about two months after the last one, still following Geo Stellar and his alien friend Omega-Xis as they fight a new evil organization trying to revive the ancient civilization known as "Mu." There are two versions: Zerker x Saurian and Zerker x Ninja; and as is with the last game, there is no need to buy both because most of the content is on either game. The game is pretty much the same as the old one with RPG-style progression and card-based combat, but there is more story to play through and a somewhat cleaner presentation. In other words, if your kid(s) liked the last game, you can get this one and they'll like it even more. However, if they didn't, don't bother with this title. On the other hand, if they haven't played the last one, start with that first. It's only \$20, and we liked both games quite a bit.

Details: Capcom Entertainment, Inc., www.capcom.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: strategy, logic, some math, using data, reading tables. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 7/15/2008. [AB]

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

83%

ESRB Rating: Everyone



Naruto: Ninja Destiny

This fighting game by Dream Factory may look like the Naruto games for PS2, GameCube, Wii or PSP, but don't be fooled. This one is not nearly as fun. The combat has been dumbed down from the other versions, replaced by a power-up system. By tapping the stylus on the screen, players can use one of many randomly generated power-ups which provide an unfair advantage to a game whose characters weren't particularly fair to begin with. On the upside, the 3D graphics are pretty good for a DS game, but not good enough to counteract all the flaws in the gameplay. Skip this one. Even die-hard Naruto fans will be disappointed.

Details: D3Publisher of America, Inc., www.d3publisher.us. Price: \$30. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: fighting, timing, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.5 stars. Entry date: 3/5/2008. [AB]

Ease of Use	8
Educational	N
Entertaining	5
Design Features	4
Good Value	3

50%

ESRB Rating: Teen, Cartoon Violence





RS Tri-Bot

"Cool but annoying," the WowWee RS Tri-Bot is one of those toys that has a big novelty effect, but fades faster than the first set of batteries. According to our single test family with two children (ages 7 and 10), it is "one of those toys that should come bundled with a bottle of aspirin."

In terms of movement, this robot is impressive, with three large wheels (hence the term Tri-Bot), giving it the ability to spin faster than any other robot we've seen. So how does a three-wheeler move forward? Because each large wheel has 10 smaller roller pins on the rim, the robot can move forward or backward like a regular two or four wheeled robot. You need to watch a demo to get the idea of how it moves as it takes a bit of time to explain. The arms, mouth or other facial features don't move.

Using a remote, it is easy to simply steer the robot around--and scare a cat or dog. Other modes include a free-roam mode (the robot will move until its infrared sensors pick up a wall) and a sentry mode (the robot will wait quietly until it detects a motion).

The blessing and curse of this robot is the personality, described as a Sponge-Bob sounding comedian that some will find funny, and others will find annoying. For some reason, we consistently found the voice to be un-funny, which is perhaps why our single test family RAN it out to our car, put it in the drivers seat, and said, "I don't ever want to hear that thing's voice again." So is there any educational value to this? There is a Program Mode, where you can store up to 40 movements, that can be replayed. Other features include two battery saving modes, which is important -- the robot requires eight AA batteries (for the robot) and 3 AAA batteries for the remote.

Details: WowWee Ltd., www.wowwee.com. Price: \$100. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: remote controls, some limited programming. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 8/8/2008. [WB]

Ease of Use	9
Educational	5
Entertaining	6
Design Features	9
Good Value	9

76%



Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution (DS)

Chess-like logic and a lot of reading are a prerequisite for this pocket-sized, turn-based version of Civilization, which has been nicely adapted for the Nintendo DS. In the game, you take command of an army of soldiers, workers and scientific advisors as you try to move your civilization ahead. The trouble is, there's only so many resources, which means you must negotiate with the other civilizations or know when to use your army. Designed for one to four players, using either local wireless mode or Wi-Fi, the game lets you choose from several different scenarios, or you can play in free-play mode. Content includes 16 civilizations, five challenge levels, and the ability to save games automatically. The touch-screen controls allow you to move squads, delegate tasks with a tap, and build civilizations using a combination of the stylus and the buttons. There are guided tutorials, five difficulty levels, and an automatic game saving feature.

Despite the extensive reading involved, our testers liked this game, and the multimedia segues helped to spice up the action. Learn more at www.civilizationrevolution.com.

Details: 2K Games, www.take2games.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: history, logic, planning, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 7/18/2008. [WB]

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

88%



ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+





Stix 200

Designed to bring Wii-like control to a Windows computer, Stix from PlayHut (\$50, www.golive2.com) is a pair of wireless, motion-sensing game controllers; plus a USB base. If you squint a bit, you'd swear you were looking at a pair of Wii Remotes, with the exception of a black, touch sensitive control pad on the front.

Stix 200 (\$50) offers 2D mouse-like controls. An additional package, called Stix 400 (\$60) is planned for October '08 and will offer an additional accelerometer for 3D movements.

After you put the two AA batteries into the controllers, you plug a receiver base into your USB port which automatically starts downloading the driver, providing you have Windows Explorer running on your computer. From this point, you can control your cursor with a flick of your wrist, from as far as 15 feet from the screen. The feeling is sluggish, in part because the cursor motion drifts on the screen, and is not mapped directly to your motion. As a result, there's a learning curve to using these controls -- if you're expecting a Wii experience, as the marketing implies, you're in for a disappointment. The left and right mouse buttons are replaced with the trigger and "A" keys, respectively.

An online arcade includes a set of standard casual games that have been adapted for the motion controls, found at <http://Sphere.GoLive2.com> (registration required). Stix 200 is out now (August 11), and Stix 400 is planned for October 2008.

The bottom line? If you're expecting a Wii experience on a Windows computer, you're likely to be disappointed, at least if your experience is the same as ours--we tested the \$50 base-level kit (the Stix 200).

Details: Playhut, Inc., www.playhut.com. Price: \$50 or \$60. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: a peripheral for Windows. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 8/19/2008. [WB]

Ease of Use	6	73%
Good Value	5	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	



Stylin' Studio

Want to see how you'd look in a purple wig? Designed for Windows computers, this new peripheral from Mattel's Radica Girl Tech division (www.girltech.com) lets you find out. Easy to use and full of features, this stylus-based virtual graphics tablet has a .3 Megapixel camera in its center. It is the second toy of this type from Radica. The first, called Digi Makeover, plugged into your TV and was much harder to use. With Stylin' Studio, putting on makeup is as easy as scribbling.

After you install and start up the software, which comes on an included CD, you plug the pad into a USB port. This process worked easily on our Windows Vista test machine. Next, you line up the camera -- a process that is helped by a small mirror, and snap a photo. There are a few minor quirks to note. There is a large, easy to press on/off button that can be pressed accidentally, especially if you think you're taking a picture. Also, if you're already using a webcam, you'll need to unplug it. These are minor points; you quickly learn when not to press the button.

The real fun begins when you import a face; either yours or someone else's, from an existing digital photo, and start trying on eye liner, outfits, scarves, earrings, hats, hairstyles and more, by simply dragging and dropping with the fat, tethered stylus. It is easy to save work for emailing or perhaps uploading to your facebook page, just in case you're in the mood for a tiara.

Details: Mattel, Inc., www.mattel.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Windows XP or Vista. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, intrapersonal skills, makeup. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 8/12/2008. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	96%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	10	





TimeLiner XE

School reports will never be the same, with tools like this new edition of TimeLiner XE, for Mac or Windows computers. So your first question is probably, "What does the XE stand for?" We're not sure, and neither are the folks at Tom Snyder Productions. Apparently, it just sounds good, although we might suggest "X-pensive Edition" given the \$100 price.

What is clear is that this edition is a lot more than a timeline making utility, as the price suggests. TimeLiner XE is an integrated data organizing package, that can quickly turn Internet searches into a finished timeline, with references. It is also a presentation tool, with a new Slide Show option, that presents the events in your timeline one event at a time. Other content includes hundreds of project ideas, pre-selected research tools, clip art, sample timelines and homework assignments.

After you install 418 MB file on your hard drive and enter the registration codes, you are presented with a rather confusing array of project and homework options. A note to designers: add a big "make a timeline" button. Once you've set up your template, the program makes it easy to cite references, and click or drag graphics from the web or pre-selected sources--such as Scholastic's Grolier encyclopedia, Google, Yahoo, Kidsclick, Ask for Kids, Digital History, PBS Online, Encyclopedia Smithsonian and the Library of Congress. You simply find an image, drag it onto your data grid, and the program automatically snags the URL for a reference.

While all these extras are nice, they add to the learning curve of the experience. Those already familiar with past versions of TimeLiner will have no problem jumping in and making a project. Work can be printed or exported in PDF format (we would have liked more graphic format options, here). The bottom line? TimeLiner XE is a powerful creativity tool that can help students organize their work. But it helps to use the features.

Details: Tom Snyder Productions, www.tomsnyder.com. Price: \$100 and up. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: organization, writing, temporal relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 7/28/2008. [WB]

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

88%





New & Future Releases

SEPTEMBER 1, 2008

This section contains a listing, with notes, on products currently being reviewed or being considered for a review. Some of these may appear in upcoming issues following further testing.

Age of Empires: Mythologies

Fill your DS with Greek gods, mummies and shrines in this version of Age of Empires for the DS. It features three playable civilizations allowing you to command Greek, Egyptian and Norse armies, wage war, explore new frontiers and lead them to victory. You can also tailor your powers by choosing specific gods to worship and satisfy, allowing you to smite your enemies with plagues, lightning storms and earthquakes. In addition, you can play with up to three friends via local connection or Nintendo Wi-Fi.

Details: THQ, Inc., www.thq.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Nintendo DS.

Teaches/Purpose: fictionalized history, mythology, ancient civilizations. Entry date: 7/29/2008.



Cheetah Girls: Passport to Stardom, The

Players can use the DS stylus to "tap" their way through some of their favorite Cheetah Girl's songs, including five new songs from the "The Cheetah Girls One World" Disney Channel Original Movie. The game picks up where the movie left off, with the girls exploring and performing their way through India and participating in international competitions. You will compete in a series of dance-offs, play minigames to create the perfect fashions for the Cheetah Girls and learn dance moves from Gita. You will also explore nine different locations in three international cities - Mumbai, New York City, and Barcelona. New to this game is DGame, the new online community exclusively for Disney gamers. Here you can create 3D avatars, create a profile, chat with friends in a Cheetah Girls chat room, share Cheetah Girls themed accessories, earn in-game honors, and unlock exclusive Disney content. Developed for Disney Interactive Studios by Handheld Games.

Details: Disney Interactive Studios, www.disney.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 6-14. Platform:

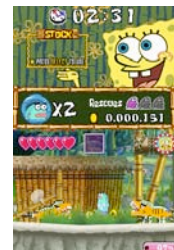
Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: music, singing, rhythm. Entry date: 8/25/2008.

Drawn to Life: SpongeBob Squarepants Edition

In this game, SpongeBob and Patrick discover a magic pencil that brings whatever it draws to life. The evil SpongeBob drawing - DoodleBob - also has a pencil and uses it to cause havoc in Bikini Bottom. You must draw your own hero, defeat DoodleBob's drawings, and rescue SpongeBob and his friends. You can also draw and customize your own Bikini Bottom home, play against friends in two-player VS. mode, and battle, erase, and redraw enemies as you work your way through the game. Scheduled for release Fall 2008.

Details: THQ, Inc., www.thq.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo DS.

Teaches/Purpose: creativity, logic. Entry date: 7/29/2008.



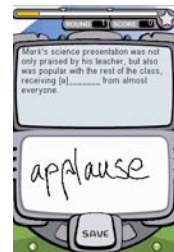
futureU

Test prep software is hardly new, either in online versions or on a computer screen. But test prep on a Nintendo DS is, especially considering the potential of the touch screen and the portable form factor.

Based on content from Kaplan, futureU contains six games: two each for reading, writing, and math--each designed to present bite-sized bits of test-related concepts, handy for a bus ride or a break between classes. One game in reading is called "Glyph", where you build words like "symbiosis" using the stylus to flick the Latin roots (bio and life) to the top part of the screen, shuffleboard style. Each correct answer is saved. At any point, you can jump back to another game. Other activities have you completing a paragraph by writing in the best word. The Writing section has two games: In Tense and Line Up, plus two additional games for the Math Section.

There were points that we had to admit feeling frustrated by questions, requiring instant knowledge of square roots, grid puzzles and other infrequently applied skills. But that's the name of the SAT game, after all. We did not test the Window or Mac version (\$40 each). According to press materials, content includes 1,200 questions, and progress can be tracked over time. See also My SAT Coach for the Nintendo DS, from Ubisoft, that uses Princeton Review content.

Details: Aspyr Media Inc., www.aspyr.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 14-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: SAT test prep, reading, comprehension, writing, math. Entry date: 7/10/2008.





Guitar Hero: Aerosmith

Aerosmith fans take note: this is the first time the band has appeared in any video game context. As another edition of Guitar Hero, there are no surprises. The content features the music of Steven Tyler, Joe Perry, Brad Whitford, Tom Hamilton and Joey Kramer, whose movements have been digitized for a realistic effect. Players can experience Aerosmith's career, from their first gig to becoming rock legends. As they progress through the game, they can play the band's greatest hits, in typical Guitar Hero format. Our testers found the game to be "a typical Guitar Hero game." Developed by Neversoft (PS3 and Xbox 360); Vicarious Visions (Wii); and Budcat (PS2). The cost is \$60 for Xbox 360 and PS3 (\$100 for bundle with guitar); \$50 for Wii and PS2 (bundle is \$100 for Wii and \$90 for PS2).

Details: RedOctane/Activision, www.redoctane.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 10-up. Platform: PlayStation 3*, Xbox 360, Wii, PlayStation 2. Teaches/Purpose: hand-eye coordination, rhythm, music. Entry date: 7/15/2008.



Leapster2

The new Leapster2 handheld looks and plays nearly identically to the older Leapster system. The touch screen is still a little fuzzy, and the controls are a little bit sluggish, compared to the Nintendo DS.

It features built-in tutorials and learning levels that adapt automatically to your child's skill level. It features a touch screen and stylus and is compatible with all previous Leapster learning games. New to this version is the ability for your child to connect it to the computer for additional online games, activities and rewards they've earned. There is also an online creativity studio where your child can upload art they've created, embellish it or change it completely, and publish to share. In addition, with the new USB connection, parents can see their children's progress in recent games, get detailed updates on the skills they are exploring and share in their accomplishments.

Details: LeapFrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$70. Ages: 4-8. Platform: Leapster. Teaches/Purpose: all school subjects. Entry date: 8/5/2008.



Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa Video Game

The second Madagascar video game, Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa Video Game is based on the second DreamWorks movie. In the 12-level game, you can play as one of the four characters, each with unique powers. For example, Alex the Lion has a loud roar and can throw mangos, while Marty the Zebra can jump and kick.

Play modes include swimming, driving, racing, playing soccer and safari photography that includes platforming, exploration, collection and combat challenges. There's also a multiplayer tournament mode. Environments include the Watering Hole, the African Jungle and Savannah, the Hippo Mud Pit and the Volcano. Created for Activision by Toys for Bob (PS3, Xbox 360, Wii), Aspyr (Games for Windows/PC), Idol Minds (PS2) and Amaze (Nintendo DS). Coming November 2008. Note that the ESRB ratings vary depending on the platform, but all are either E or E10+, with some mild suggestive themes and cartoon violence.

Details: Activision, Inc., www.activision.com. Price: \$20 (PC) to \$50. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Windows, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, Wii, Xbox 360, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, collaborative play, timing. Entry date: 8/27/2008.

My Meebas

Playing off the notion of a hidden surprise inside, My Meebas (\$20 from Mattel) is a sealed plastic tube with small starfish-sized plush toy hidden inside. In order to get the tube open, children must pick the lock by playing a sliding watch-sized LCD game that is mounted on the outside of the tube.

The tubes come in six themes, and might hide any one of 60 different species of My Meebas inside. The LCD screen displays a character that grows as more games are played. Once it is fully developed, the tube pops open, releasing the toy inside. Unfortunately, we were never able to find out how long this takes, because our tester, an eight-year-old girl, gave the tube to her 14-year-old brother who pried the lid open with a screw driver. According to the website (www.mymeebas.everythinggirl.com), there are 20 games, with seven levels. While the idea is a good one, don't plan on hiding your jewelry inside the tube. Runs on two AAA batteries (included).

Details: Mattel Inc., www.mattel.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 6-12. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: collecting, logic. Entry date: 8/11/2008.





My Secret Diary

Part of the My Games Series for girls, this cartridge turns your Nintendo DS into a password protected journal, address book and database of friend details. Other content includes personality and compatibility quizzes, Fortune Cookie and Crystal Ball features. Using the DS wireless abilities, you can also send secret messages to friends. See also My Make-Up and My Secret Diary. This title will be available Oct. 2008.

Details: Oxygen Games, www.oxygengames.net. Price: \$30. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, interpersonal relationships, socialization. Entry date: 8/13/2008.



Puzzle Quest Galactrix

The second in the Puzzle Quest series (the first was Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords, released last year), this chess-like game for one or two players (the second player being online) is most accurately described as "puzzle game meets RPG for multiplayer." When you're in the online mode, there's a leader board system, so you can find others at the same level. The board is comprised of hexagons, increasing the move possibilities as well as the complexity of the game. Created by Infinite Interactive for D3 Publisher.

Details: D3Publisher of America, Inc., www.d3publisher.us. Price: \$30. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Windows, Nintendo DS, Xbox Live Arcade. Teaches/Purpose: logic, strategy. Entry date: 7/30/2008.

Robot Galaxy (www.robotgalaxy.com)

Think Build-a-Bear (the mall-based franchise) only with snap-together robots, and you get the idea of Robot Galaxy (www.robotgalaxy.com), a new Canadian-based franchise targeting boys. Besides robots, parents can purchase stickers, vehicles and accessories, comic books, and additional snap-on accessories. The robots, which resemble large Transformers with an array of battle gear, start with a \$12 core, and can then be customized with different arm and leg options, which range from \$5 to \$10 each. Or, you can purchase a pre-assembled robot for \$48. The robots can also snap into a transporter vehicle, which can be programmed with different movements by pressing one of four direction keys.

The educational innuendoes used in the marketing materials ("kids will gain exposure to and knowledge of science, mechanics, robotics, space exploration, computers, and other fields") is overblown. This isn't a LEGO type of creativity, and Robot Galaxy is more about pretending than programming. Still, the robots are very easy to use and the mix-and-match idea lets children have a degree of choice in the design.

Robot galaxy is the idea of Oliver Mitchell, a father in search of play options for his sons. He partnered with Ken Pilot, former President of the Gap brand. According to press materials, an MMOG is planned. Currently you can buy robots or play robot-related games at www.robotgalaxy.com.

Details: Robot Galaxy, www.robotgalaxy.com. Price: \$48. Ages: 5-12. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: some creativity, programming. Entry date: 8/24/2008.



Secret Diary

From the makers of Pocket Safe, a code encrypted 1 MB USB drive, comes an adaptation targeting teenage girls. The drive has a tiny numeric keypad designed for entering a four digit pin number. After you enter your four digit code, a series of LEDs flash, giving you 30 seconds to insert the drive into your Windows computer. (Note that the packaging incorrectly states that it will work with a Macintosh. While the disk is recognized by the Mac, the software is Windows only). As long as you're using a Windows computer, your diary opens automatically, showing today's date. Your entry can consist of text, images or sketches. Other goodies include a star rating system, a random advice giver, some mood art and a fortune cookie. (e.g., "It feels like powerful people are being too critical of you... try to ignore them.") The creativity options are surprisingly powerful, compared to other diary programs we've reviewed.

There is no calendar, however, and the days are shown one page at a time. It is not easy to export work, and it also isn't clear what you do when you fill up the memory. The security features combined with a diary is clearly a good idea, but it is probably a good thing that Anne Frank didn't keep her diary on one of these things, or we'd never know what she wrote.

Details: Black Box Innovations, www.takeanyware.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: writing, communication. Entry date: 8/27/2008.





Sims 2 Apartment Life Expansion Pack, The

This expansion pack for The Sims 2 takes your Sims out of the suburbs into a new apartment building. They can explore their neighborhood, mingle in coffee shops, visit a playground and meet friends. New character types include artsy bohemians, sports jocks, gadget-loving techies, and gear heads. Features include a reputation meter, so your Sims can build up respect and be the most admired--or least-desired--in the neighborhood. The better the reputation, the easier for your Sims to find the right friends to help them achieve their goals.

Five new building types include lofts, posh studios and luxury apartments complete with a butler. Furnishing options include spiral staircases and high ceilings. Note that this is an expansion pack, meaning that a version of The Sims 2 must be installed on your Windows computer in order to play. Visit www.thesims2.com.

Details: Electronic Arts, Inc., www.ea.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 12-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, relationships. Entry date: 8/4/2008.

Sims 2 Apartment Pets, The

Designed exclusively for the Nintendo DS, The Sims 2 Apartment Pets game puts your Sims into their own apartment with a variety of pets. In addition to caring for your own pet, there is a pet spa downstairs. This is where you will care for dogs, cats, snakes, hamsters, birds and rabbits, and make sure they are happy, healthy, and well-groomed. You will earn Simoleans that can be used to furnish your apartment and buy fun accessories for your pet including hats, shoes, and toys. You can use the Nintendo DS touch screen and stylus to play mini games including one where you charm a snake by blowing into the microphone as if it were a musical instrument.

Details: Electronic Arts, Inc., www.ea.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, responsibility. Entry date: 8/4/2008.

Soulcalibur IV

Fun but racy (parent's take a good look at the ESRB descriptors) this latest version of Soulcalibur features many familiar faces from the past edition, along with new fighters. For example, there's Darth Vader for the PS3 and Jedi Master Yoda for the Xbox 360, as well as Darth Vader's Secret Apprentice from the new Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, who will make an appearance on both platforms. The game also features 720p HD graphics, and a new lineup of characters including Hilde, who is fighting to rid her land of the villainous Nightmare.

The new fighting elements include Active Matching Battle (AMB) which allows players to fight against multiple opponents under different circumstances; Equipment Destruction that allows the players to destroy pieces of their enemies' armor once their Soul Gauge is weakened; and Critical Finish which lets players defeat opponents regardless of their health bar status. The game also features multiple modes of play including Story, Arcade, Tower of Lost Souls, Training, Character Creation and Museum. In addition, you can fight online in Standard VS Mode or Special VS Mode. Note: the Partial Nudity descriptor refers to some scantily clad characters.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., www.namcobandaigames.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 14-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360. Teaches/Purpose: fighting, logic. Entry date: 7/29/2008.



Spy Trackdown

This is a complex electronic board game where you are a spy on a mission to save the world from an evil mastermind. You will travel by helicopter, jet, boat, and motorcycle to 52 cities in search of the enemy. The Spy Phone will call out your name, and you must pick it up to receive your private message. The phone also tracks each player's every move and knows where you are in relation to the enemy. It then customizes your messages to help lead you to him. It also delivers public messages to the players. Players must use strategy and deductive reasoning, as well as memory and listening skills to find the enemy. Although more than one player may discover the whereabouts of the enemy during the course of the game, the winner is the one who successfully captures him. We tried the game briefly at Game Testers, but the testers (aged 12 and 14) gave up. Requires 3 AAA batteries (not included).

Details: Wild Planet, www.wildplanet.com. Price: \$25. Ages: 8-up. Platform: electronic board game. Teaches/Purpose: geography, deductive reasoning, strategy. Entry date: 7/15/2008.





Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09

Now you can not only golf with Tiger Woods, you can receive coaching from his personal coach, Hank Haney. Haney will assist you as you hit the links and try to advance your career to win the FedExCup. Your skill level is dynamic, constantly adjusting throughout the round just as it would during a real afternoon of golf. Following each round, Haney will deliver customized feedback on your performance, allowing all gamers to compete at any level.

The game also features a new Club Tuner, allowing you to tune your individual wedges, irons, woods and driver to customize your bag--weighing the risks of club performance versus ease of use. In addition, the enhanced EA Sports GamerNet features all new instant challenges where you can earn points in any game mode and climb the Daily GamerNet Leaderboards. These Instant Challenges appear throughout every round, providing opportunities to earn GamerNet points while playing other modes. The Online Mode features a new Online Simultaneous Play allowing up to four players to play each hole at the same time, rather than waiting for each player to complete their shot. If you finish the hole first, you can switch to spectator mode to see your partners' characters as they finish up the hole. The game also features new locations including Gary Player Country Club in South Africa and Sheshan Golf Club in China, as well as new golfers including Se Ri Pak, Darren Clarke, Nick Dougherty, and Rory McIlroy.

Details: EA Sports (Electronic Arts, Inc.), www.easports.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 10-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, PlayStation 2, PSP. Teaches/Purpose: sports, golf. Entry date: 8/25/2008.



Toothtunes Junior

Toothtunes Junior has the same technology as the original Toothtunes, which transmits songs, phrases and music vibrations from the bristles, through the teeth, to the inner ear. But the junior version is smaller in size, and it includes one minute of preschool-friendly music and encouraging phrases. Children will hear one motivational phrase as they begin to brush their teeth, another phrase in the middle of the cycle to encourage them to keep brushing, and another phrase at the end to reward them for completing their brushing. The Toothtunes Junior line includes: If You're Happy and You Know It Brush Your Teeth; Walt Disney songs including Bear Necessities and Hakuna Matata; and theme music from My Little Pony and Transformers.

Also new from Toothtunes are Turbo Toothtunes (ages 6-up) with improved sound technology. Titles available in this line include songs from High School Musical 2, Hannah Montana, Rihanna, the Jonas Brothers and Aly & AJ. There are also special edition Toothtunes featuring songs rerecorded especially for Toothtunes including Brush It recorded by Devo and Waking Up Is Hard To Do recorded by Neil Diamond.

Details: Tiger Electronics (Hasbro), www.hasbro.com/tiger/. Price: \$10. Ages: 3-5. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: dental health. Entry date: 8/20/2008.



Top Spin 3

Our testers liked the the Wii version of this tennis simulation that lets you play as top-ranked tennis pros such as Roger Federer and Maria Sharipova, as well as tennis legends including Boris Becker, Bjorn Borg and Monica Seles. You can also create your own player with a sculpting editor, and customize swing animations as well as frosting items such as hair, makeup and tattoos. According to press materials, the console versions feature new gameplay controls that incorporate the right thumbstick, allowing for precise movements and shot variety. The game contains 40 venues including the US Open, Rolland Garros, and Australian Open. You can also play online via singles or doubles in Exhibition, Custom, or World Tour Matches.

The DS version is a little complicated to setup (lots of mode options) but is fun, and the sound is incredible--it makes you feel as if you're in the game.

Details: 2K Sports, www.2ksports.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: sports, tennis. Entry date: 7/15/2008.





WowWee Alive Cub

We've reviewed a lot of robotic plush toys this past year, but none that attracts attention quite as effectively as the WowWee Alive Cub (\$60, www.wowwee.com). That's because the cat-sized plush toy is soft to the touch and looks real when it moves its eyes and mouths. There are four cub varieties: lion; white tiger; polar bear; and panda bear. Each has a rubbery face, and can make sounds when touched. A pat on the head might yield a yelp, and a rub on the back can make the cub growl or purr. Tilt sensors enable the cub to react (not happily) when it is repeatedly turned over, and if you leave your cub alone for five minutes he (or she) will go to sleep, following five minutes of snoring. Each animal is fueled by four AA batteries (included) that are stored in a velcro control box hidden deep in the belly. If you've always wanted a pet cat, here's an option you can tell the landlord about.

Details: WowWee Ltd., www.wowwee.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: an anamnetic toy. Entry date: 8/25/2008.



www.wizard101.com

Wizard101 is a multiplayer, online game that lets you experience a wizard's journey from learning how to control and use magic to exploring far off places and using your magic to save others from harm. As you progress there are other activities such as dueling against other Wizards, playing minigames in the Wizard City carnival area, and using different dyes to change the colors of your clothes. To play, you start by creating a wizard character according to what you think is most important. You then learn how to use magic to help you along during your journey. After that, you choose a School of Magic from the seven schools offered and build a magic deck. The cards are magic spells and consist of Fire spells, Ice spells, spells of Myth and more which can be used to summon strange creatures such as the Evil Snowman and Stormzilla. You can also adopt magical pets such as a tiny dragon or flying pig.

According to PR information, the site features an Ultimate Secure Chat system that offers a wide range of pre-selected phrases, greetings and emotions to give players flexibility with their in-game communication while keeping exchanges family friendly. In addition, all player names are selected from pre-configured lists that allow players to choose a name to reflect their individuality without enabling them to create a name that is inappropriate or give out personal information.

The game is currently in Beta Review and prospective game testers can sign up at www.wizard101.com. Beta testers can play the game and provide feedback to Kingsisle prior to the release of Wizard101 in the third quarter of 2008.

Details: Kingsisle Entertainment Inc., www.wizard101.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: logic, creativity. Entry date: 7/29/2008.

