Dr. Cheesman’s App Chat:
Ten Interactive Books for Kids, Teens, and Adults

By Elaine Cheesman, Ph.D.

Sometimes it pays to be sneaky—or creative! A friend’s three-year old begged her mom to let her watch a video on the iPad. As the child happily began to view the “video,” I saw that it wasn’t a movie at all, but an interactive book app! Hmm. Maybe that mom was on to something.

Unlike videos or television, interactive book apps develop language comprehension—background knowledge, academic vocabulary, reasoning skills, and understanding of language structures. The most engaging interactive book apps enhance the reading experience in ways not possible with conventional print or recorded books. In other words, apps do more than simply narrate the text; they encourage interactions that enhance the content.

In this review, I will highlight a few apps I found particularly engaging for kids and teens/adults, including literature, poetry, and non-fiction, or informational books. To make the cut, the app had to be sufficiently intuitive for independent use, employ engaging interactions that maintained attention while enhancing the text, and (when appropriate) feature professional narration with highlighted words. In a future article, I will review apps designed to help the beginning reader practice decoding and spelling skills.

To help review these apps, I enlisted the help of three experts—a friend’s three-year old daughter, my grandniece Hannah, age eleven, and grandnephew Nathan, age nine. My method was simple: I started the apps, and then stood back and watched. When the young readers automatically re-started the app time after time, I knew I had a winner. Here are a few apps my precocious experts liked the best.

APPS FOR KIDS

1. **Nursery Rhymes with StoryTime** by ustwo™
   
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   Nursery Rhymes with StoryTime by ustwo™
   
   My friend’s three-year old “read” this book cover-to-cover, independently! Then she started it again . . . and again . . . and again. She was fully engaged for over a half-hour, in a room with noisy grown-ups, until Mom and Dad made her put it down to go home. Each nursery rhyme is accompanied with ingenious, interactive illustrations that enhance the text and vocabulary.


2. **Blue Hat, Green Hat - Boynton** by Loud Crow Interactive Inc.

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3. **Goodnight Moon** by Loud Crow Interactive Inc.

   Loud Crow Interactive ingeniously blends quality children’s literature with just-right interactions! Definitely check out all their growing list of titles. Hannah loved this book when she was little, and enjoyed it just as much as a pre-teen. She and Nathan spontaneously re-started it several times, until Mmm made us all go to bed. Well, it was past 10:00 p.m. on a school night.


4. **The Monster at the End of This Book...starring Grover!** by Sesame Street

   Nathan still loves this book, and reads it with more expression than the iPad narration! The interactions enhance the story line without disrupting the plot.

   https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/monster-at-end-this-book...starring/id409467802?mt=8

5. **The Cat in the Hat** by Dr. Seuss by Oceanhouse Media

   This is only one of the many Dr. Seuss books by Oceanhouse Media. All are beautifully presented in their original form. The words highlight as they are narrated. As an extra bonus, little fingers can touch the illustrations to name objects.


6. **Amelia and Terror of the Night - Interactive Story Book for Kids** by OhNoo Studio

   This one is more appropriate for older children and pre-teens. The narration is augmented by touching the characters and “hidden” features.


APPS FOR TEENS AND ADULTS

These interactive books for teens and adults extend the standard e-book format with informative, engaging, and purposeful interactions.

1. **Shakespeare In Bits** by Mindconnex Learning Ltd.

This is the free, try-it-out version of a series of Shakespeare in Bits apps, which include all the popular plays—Romeo & Juliet, Macbeth, etc. This multimedia collection includes animated "actors" whose lines are highlighted and narrated as a play. In-line translations are a touch away. The app includes study notes for each section, plot analyses, and summaries.

2. Poems By Heart from Penguin Classics by Penguin Group USA

Reciting poems just made a comeback! Twenty-four classic poems from Shakespeare, Poe, Dickinson, and others are presented with narrated text first, and then as a memorization fill-in-the-missing-word game to help you memorize the text.

3. e+Chess Books by ePlusBooks.com Limited

I beat 9-year-old Nathan and 11-year-old Hannah at chess, but only barely! Full disclosure: I survived by imitating Nathan’s moves. I never had the patience to read a chess book, but this app may save my honor. This app gives you a book and a chess set, which makes the moves described in the text.

4. The History of Jazz - an interactive timeline by 955 Dreams

Reading a book on Jazz is like reading a cookbook—you just can’t get the flavor through text and pictures. This app, made specifically for the iPad, is a wonderful blend of text, images, and video.

WEB RESOURCES

Here’s how to find a good app without wasting money. First, search the websites below. Second, do a web-search using the name of a specific app. Results may provide additional reviews and movies of the app in action on www.youtube.com. Next, go to the developer’s web site for more information and user reviews. Finally, go to the app store. Pay attention to the poor reviews as well as to the positive ones! These contain good information, but read the reviews before you spend the bucks!

Kids:
- http://childrenstech.com/ (also search KAPi Awards on this site)
- www.kirkusreviews.com/ (search: top book app)
- www.parents-choice.org/allawards.cfm (Mobile app category)

Teens and adults:

All audiences:
- http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/tools/apps

Send Me Your App Recommendations!

If you would like to recommend an app, send me the information via email at: DrECheesman@Gmail.com. You can go into the iTunes app store, click on the app, and then email it to me. It will provide all the information below. Or you can describe it and include

(a) the name of the app
(b) the developer
(c) the URL

More of Dr. Cheesman’s App Chats:

iPad Apps for Literacy Instruction

Dr. Cheesman is an associate professor at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. The courses she developed are among the nine university programs officially recognized by the International Dyslexia Association for meeting the Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading.