Dr. Cheesman's App Chat: Word Games and Logic Puzzles

By: Elaine Cheesman, Ph.D.

Word games and logic puzzle apps make perfect gifts for both young and old! These games and puzzles are one way to sneak in practice with spelling and problem-solving skills during the holiday break. With direction, word and spelling games can be used to strengthen memory for known graphemes (letter patterns) when students are challenged to focus on certain patterns (e.g., vowel teams like ai, ay or consonant digraphs like sh, th, ng, etc.).

Online Bookstore

Logic games help reduce boredom, increase our ability to think logically, improve concentration, and enhance processing speed and working memory—a type of short-term holding bin used when working with new information. Solving puzzles can be used as a reward or as a break from literacy instruction, while giving your hard-working student some well-earned personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.

The apps reviewed here are free or relatively inexpensive (except where noted), and do not have annoying pop-up advertisements. They all have been carefully selected for their ability to stimulate the brain with unique challenges and problems. Many have versions for iPhone and Android as well. Warning! These have been shown to be highly addictive!

Word Games

SpellGrid by Freshlogo

This app has two game modes: Spell Grid and Spell and Fill. In Spell Grid mode, the object is to score 25 points by spelling as many words as possible using adjacent letters in a 3 x 3 grid. Hint Letters (which must be unlocked) help you to complete the grid for a 50-point bonus. The Hint Letters provide scaffolding help—a combination of letters and blank lines arranged by three-, four- five-, and six-letter words. The built-in dictionary helps increase spelling and vocabulary skills. The Spell & Fill mode uses a 5 x 5 grid. The object is to find as many words as you can before you get stuck. Once you spell a word, the used letters disappear and new ones will fill the grid.

SpellTower by Zach Gage

Spell Tower encourages the player to use longer words for more points. Tap adjacent letters to form words and eliminate tiles. It has five challenging modes. At the conclusion of the game, you can see the list of words you created and access dictionary entries, including parts of speech and etymology (word origin).

Letris 3: Word puzzle game by kirovich Games

This is just like traditional solitaire, but the cards are letters! The object is to rearrange the cards so that one uses all of the letters to spell words. Even novice spellers will have success with two- and three-letter words. The game offers feedback by rejecting illegal letter sequences. You can only drag letters onto other letters that form sequences that will form real words! Intermediate and advanced players—compound words, multisyllabic words, or adding suffixes will increase scores! A tutorial guides you through the game strategy the first time you play.

Spell & Fill

This works like the familiar Tetris game, but with seven different languages! You can even play in two different languages at once! Letter blocks fall from the top of the screen. Your task is to use these to build words. The letters do not have to be adjacent. You can see the list of words typed at the end of the game; tap to access the definition and related web sites. (must have internet access.) Modes: one player, split screen to play with a friend, or online through the game center. One can play alone or with a partner in split screen mode. Word lists display at the conclusion of the game.

Spellvetica by Chuchud Industries

This is a slightly different version of a tangram app.

Logic Puzzles and Games

Chess Pro - with coach by Christophe Thiron ($9.99)

The game of chess has a well-deserved reputation for helping people as young as nine to develop strategic thinking skills and anticipate consequences. It also cultivates spatial analysis and non-verbal reasoning ability. This app is a chess board with built-in tutorial options. When one plays against a personal trainer, the virtual coach shows you the four best moves a Grandmaster would pick, along with upcoming threats. The training feature includes 52 difficulty levels, from complete beginner to world champion. The rules of chess are included and easily accessible for reference. If you play an illegal move, Chess Pro tells you why the move is not allowed.

TanZen HD Lite - Relaxing tangram puzzles by Little White Bear Studios, LLC

This is just like traditional solitaire, but the cards are letters! The object is to rearrange the cards so that one uses all of the letters to spell words. Even novice spellers will have success with two- and three-letter words. The game offers feedback by rejecting illegal letter sequences. You can only drag letters onto other letters that form sequences that will form real words! Intermediate and advanced players—compound words, multisyllabic words, or adding suffixes will increase scores! A tutorial guides you through the game strategy the first time you play.

Montezuma Puzzle and Montezuma Puzzle 2 by ECO Pawel Jarosz

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This is a slightly different version of a tangram app.
Recipient of the “Best Mobile App for Kids” award (2012) and #1 Top Strategy Game in App Store 2010, this app challenges players of all ages to push Pushy home. Here’s the catch. You must determine, through trial and error, how the different elements of the puzzle operate, and what tasks need to be done. For example, Pushy must move obstacles and dump a red ball into a red hole. Prepare for the unexpected! After completing all relevant tasks, move Pushy to his home. If you solved everything correctly, you will advance to the next level!

Where’s My Water? by Disney
https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/where-is-my-water/id449735650

My nine-year-old grand-nephew Ethan recommended this one. Using a combination of physics and logic, the user must direct the “water” through the sand (not the stone) to the alligator’s shower faucet, all the while avoiding “acid,” propagating “algae,” and other hazards. Sometimes the water must be routed through other pipes or interact with “machines” to open up a route to the shower.

Send Me Your App Recommendations!

If you would like to recommend an app, send me the information via email at: DrECheesman@Gmail.com or www.MyReading-WritingHelp.org. Just describe it and include the name of the app and the developer. Also, you can go into the iTunes app store, click on the app, and then email me the link.

More of Dr. Cheesman’s App Chats:

- Literacy Instruction
- Dr. Cheesman’s App Chat: Spelling
- Interactive Books for Kids, Teens, Adults

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

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