

DISCOVERIE



Special needs

Here are some new special Needs software programs, developed by companies especially for those with special learning needs. If you are attending the Closing The Gap Conference, be sure to visit the Exhibits and the booths of many of these companies to see the products first hand. Thank you for producing the quality products that we use in our classrooms, therapy sessions and at home.

Kurzweil 3000 for Windows Version 8 (Kurzweil Educational System: 800-894-5374, <www.kurzweiledu.com>) This is an outstanding reading, writing and learning program for students with visual, reading, writing or learning difficulties, appropriate for elementary through college level. An extensive group of tools helps students read, write, take tests independently, study, etc. The software can access virtually any document or publication, whether printed or electronic, and read the words aloud to the student in a clear, human-like synthetic speech with dual highlighting. It's also a talking word processor, with word prediction, dictionary, and other writing aids...but it's much more than that. Here are some of the features and benefits: Document zoom (document text or graphics can be made as large as needed with just a click of the zoom button); Dual highlighting (A sentence, paragraph, line or phrase is highlighted in one color, and then another color highlights each word as it is read aloud.); Adjustable reading speed (Students can adjust reading speed by adjusting words per minute spoken

– there's also a choice of voices); Magnifying each word being read (The magnifier window is a special window that displays on top of an open document. It shows each word in large type as Kurzweil 3000 reads. You can set the number of words visible in the magnifier window and each word appears on a separate line. This works when you are reading documents on the Internet as well); Quick access to word meanings (one-click access to definitions, synonyms, syllabification, and spell mode that helps decoding and reading skills. For an ESL learner, you can load an English to Spanish or English to French dictionary. There are also Homophones [to/two/too] and Confusables lists [i.e. edition/addition]); Scanned documents (With an attached scanner, and the included OCR software, any document can be scanned and then read aloud); Study skill tools: (students can bookmark, highlight text, make annotations, add voice notes, and teachers can personalize instruction with these same tools); Writing tools: (the software speaks each letter or word, there's an audible spell checker); Word prediction (Kurzweil learns the user's vocabulary and makes suggestions as the student is typing words. The word prediction box can be resized and set to follow the cursor. There is a new phonetic spelling option.); Test taking capabilities (Teachers can create and then students can independently complete worksheets, tests, fill-in-the-blanks, multiple choice, short answer or essays using writing tools, comprehension aids and visual modifications. Tests will be read aloud and stop at the area that needs an answer. Answers can



**BY JOAN TANENHAUS
COLUMNIST**

be designed so they are either typed in or dragged from a list.); Customized vocabulary lists (Teachers can create lists that can be used with word prediction, or highlighted for reading.); Picture dictionary support (Kurzweil 3000 supports picture dictionary software – such as Mayer-Johnson Picture Communication Symbols and Crick Software. Students highlight a word they do not understand, click the picture icon on the toolbar, and the picture symbol for the word appears.); Reading the Web (Kurzweil will read the text on a Web site using all of the above speech, zoom, speed, magnifying tools); Send to e-mail feature (Students compose their e-mails in Kurzweil using all of the tools, then with a single command, send it to their e-mail application.); Saving documents as audio files (Kurzweil lets you save documents as either MP3 or WAV audio files that can be listened to on MP3 players and on iPods. In this way, teachers can prepare students' work that can be

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accomplishments

What are some of the accomplishments of Helen Keller?

Helen Keller was born in 1880 and died in 1968. She became deaf and blind at the age of 19 months through a damaging brain fever. In the beginning her only means of communication was through hysterical laughing or violent tantrums.

Kurzweil 3000 (Kurzweil Educational System) has dual highlighting and a magnifying window

learned/practiced off computer as well.); Language learning (Students studying Spanish, French, German, Italian or Dutch can scan documents in these languages and hear them read aloud by male or female speakers of that language. All notetaking, highlighting and other features are available). Kurzweil is compatible with Dragon Naturally Speaking Professional Version 7, enabling users to use voice dictation, and global voice commands. Excellent print manuals are included and there is on-line support available. There are so many more excellent features and possible learning applications that it is impossible to include them all in this review. The good news is that you can download a free trial version of Kurzweil 3000 for Windows or Macintosh by going their Web site.

Big Bang (Inclusive: 800-462-0930, <www.inclusivetlc.com>) An excellent new cause and effect program for both Macintosh and Windows that is full of visual effects, music, sounds and options that will let you customize for individuals. There are four activities. In Actions, a single switch press results in a lively, animated sequence with music or sound effects, including bubbles, fireworks, balls, planes, etc., a total of 19 different animations. In Builds, a simple picture is built up in stages in response to three switch presses. When the picture is complete, an animated reward displays. There are ten picture builds. In Movements, an object (i.e., rocket, balloon, etc.) is displayed and when the user presses the switch, the object moves around the screen, leaving a tail of related objects behind it. You can select from a variety of tracking directions (left to right, right to left, diagonal, circular, etc.). Color is a simple switch activity that changes the color of the screen in response to a switch press. Each color has a different sound effect.

Options in all of the activities include the ability to show prompts or a blank screen, to control the animation time, to choose background, and to select animations. The program can be used with Touch Window, mouse, spacebar, and IntelliKeys.

SwitchIt! Jigsaw Maker (Inclusive: 800-462-0930, <www.inclusivetlc.com>) Not only is this a great new single switch program, it's also a new way to use your digital camera, reinforce language skills, practice switch use and it's for Windows and Macintosh, too. SwitchIt! Jigsaw Maker lets you take your own pictures and turn them into jigsaw type activities. Pictures can be cut into two, four, or nine piece puzzles that can be completed in a variety of ways. On the easiest level, players can click their mouse or switch or touch the touch screen and a jigsaw piece will appear and slide into place. On the second level, all the pieces appear around the screen and the player clicks on any piece to make it slide into place. Pieces can also be selected with scanning. In the third activity, one of the shapes on the screen is highlighted – players need to select the right piece by matching shapes. In the final activity, the player selects the piece and places it in the correct position. Access to all activities is by mouse, touch screen, spacebar, one switch, two switch, or scanning. If you are teaching click and drag skills, there are three levels of drag and drop (varying degrees of precision required in placing the piece). There are additional options for sound, sound effects, auditory scan, rewards and hints. The rewards at the completion of each puzzle are filled with great music and animations. The program comes with two sets of ten pictures, but its greatest feature is the ease in adding your own pictures. Just select Create a new list, name it and add your

pictures. Some ideas for lists can be all the children in the class, pictures from a class trip, common objects in the environment for language learning, seasonal or holiday pictures, category pictures (i.e., food, clothes, etc.) Age appropriate for all ages and a great choice for home and school.

Switching On Science: Habitats (Soft-Touch: 877-763-8868, <www.softtouch.com>) Another excellent program from SoftTouch that will help integrate students with significant disabilities into traditional standard curriculum. It provides simple cause and effect choice-making and turn-taking activities with science information and themes. Each press reveals more of the image while the narrator reads the text which is also displayed on-screen. The different habitats include: Desert, Grassland, Rainforest and Coniferous Forest. Then, within each habitat, there are nine choices: eight animals and one picture that defines and describes the habitat. For all these nine choices, you can choose the level of information/narration (Short Phrases, Short Sentences or Longer Sentences). For example, for Kangaroo, one of the short phrases is "fur"; the short sentence is "The kangaroo has soft wooly fur" and the long sentences are "The Kangaroo has short arms and a long tail. It has long feet and strong legs. The kangaroo's fur can be different colors". The program can be used with single switch/scanning, Touch Window, mouse and IntelliKeys. The toolbar menu across the top allows you to change options without going back to the beginning. For example, if you want to change the level of narration for different children, you can do it with the toolbar menu. The program also allows you options to select the items to present, how many at one time and where to place them in the scan array, on-screen or on the IntelliKeys keyboard. Student preferences and student performance data can be saved. The original program in this series **Switching On American History** (formerly I Know American History) provides the same kind of excellent curriculum support in the area of American history. Watch for a review in the next DISKoveries of the other new Soft-Touch program: **The Wheels on the Bus**.

Judy Lynn Wheel of Sounds (Judy Lynn Software: 732-390-8845, <www.judylynn.com>) Here's another innovative program for cause and effect, switch reinforcement, and language and readiness practice. On the cause and effect

level, players are presented with two to four pictures and a spinner. Pressing the switch causes the spinner to spin and stop at one of the pictures. (Direct selection with a mouse or Touch Screen is also available). The picture is highlighted, named, moved to the center, and its sound is played. 90 pictures are grouped in categories (vehicles, animals, colors, letters, numbers, music, house). You can add your own pictures and sounds as well. Directions to add pictures and sounds are available in the Users Guide and are thorough and easy to follow. As a second option of play, the program can be turned into a matching game. A picture is presented in the middle of the screen. Two to four pictures are displayed around it. The matching picture can be selected with switch/scanning, mouse or Touch Window. Data collection is available. Other available options include: changing the size of the text caption over the picture, control over game board and highlight picture color, spinner speed, auditory narration, and picture speed. This program's an excellent choice for home and class and because of its design, can be used for cause and effect and choice making. It offers learning opportunity in the areas of language and visual perception for switch users and for direct selectors.

Inspiration for Palm OS (Inspiration: 800-877-4292, <www.inspiration.com>) Inspiration, the visual learning tool, is now available for Palm handhelds including Dana by AlphaSmart. You can download a free 30-day trial copy from the Web site. For previous reviews of Inspiration and Kidspiration, see DISKoveries, April 2004 and December 2002.

We Sign Play Time (Production Associates: 800-535-8368, <www.wesign.com>) Featuring American Sign Language, children and mothers sing, sign, and play along to songs including Wheels on the Bus (signs for up-down-round and round, etc.), If You're Happy and You Know It (signs for emotions), Stop, Look and Listen (signs for trucks, trains and cars), This is the Way (signs for activities like brushing teeth and washing hands) and others. If ASL is part of your educational program with young children at home or at school, these videos are excellent for vocabulary, encouraging fine and gross motor skills, and promoting interactive, fun learning.

LipSync Moving Sound Formation Cards (Educational Insights: 800-995-4436,



Switching On Science: Habitats (SoftTouch) is an excellent single switch program that helps integrate students with disabilities into standard curriculum areas.

<www.educationalinsights.com>) This set of 42 color 5-inch by 7-inch cards each has a letter, a key word beginning with the letter, and a "moving mouth" that shows how the sound is formed. The picture shows a close-up view of a mouth and when the students tilt the card, they can see the mouth "move" and watch how the sound is being formed. On the back is a description of the sound (place and manner of articulation) how to make the sound, and words for practice. Sounds include consonants, short and long vowels, digraphs (sh, th, etc.) diphthongs (sounds made up of two vowel sounds, such as oi), and other vowel sounds. Good for speech pathologists and teachers of children learning English as a Second Language.

Mama Gallina's Sing-Along Songs-La Esceuleta de Mama Gallina (Madacy: 305-865-6273) This series of Spanish and English songs for preschoolers, has different volumes about vowels, colors, shapes, numbers and multiplication tables. Each song is sung in English and in Spanish and each volume includes a booklet with song information and stickers. Good for ESL and/or bilingual preschoolers.

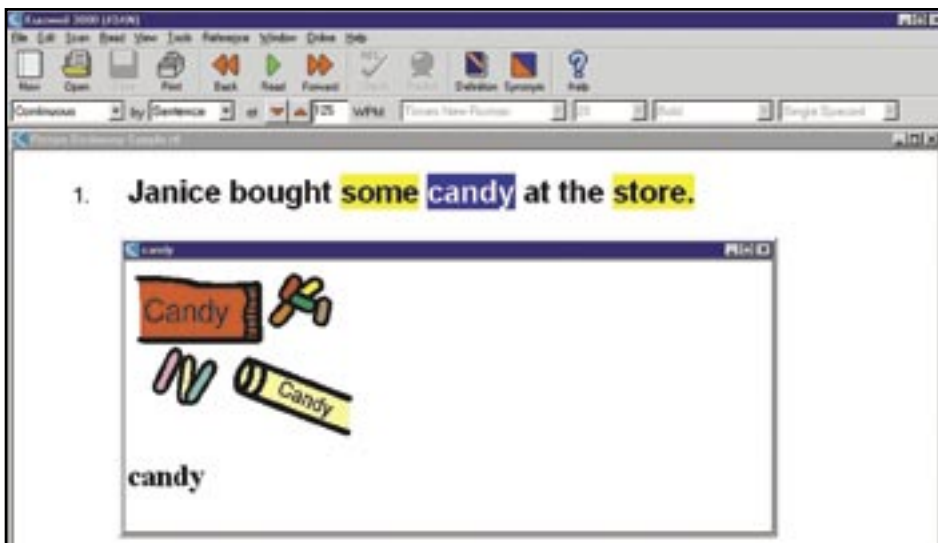
Kindergarten-Grade 4

Here are some new children's software programs that feature common themes and special characters from popular toys, movies

and television shows. These are good to use to set a context for language learning and for other skills such as visual perception, turn-taking, attention and focus. Because they are part of the shared knowledge of childhood, they are very motivating and can also be helpful tools of inclusion.

Tonka Firefighter (Atari: www.atarikids.com) A fun Windows program for ages 3-6 that teaches about firefighters and the things they do. Children drive four different fire trucks in eight multi-level missions: putting out fires, saving kittens, rescuing firefighters, etc. Children use the mouse to move the fire trucks around the screen, and press the spacebar to sound the siren or horn. To put out fires, they move the crosshair cursor and position it over a fire. Then they click and hold the mouse button to shoot the water. In some activities, they click on on-screen arrows to move up, down, right and left. There's also a fun fireworks celebration where children can launch a series of fireworks by selecting sound, shape and color options. The program also includes printable certificates, safety signs, coloring pages, and printable color pictures of the vehicles.

Strawberry Shortcake Amazing Cookie Party (Riverdeep/The Learning Co: 800-825-4420, <www.learningcompany.com>) Players collect the ingredients they need to make cookies for a party. They do this by



With Kurzweil 3000 (Kurzweil Educational System), users can highlight a word and see the PCS (Picture Communication Symbol) for that word.



Big Brain Dictionary (Oregon Scientific) Touch the pictures with the pen and hear the name and definitions spoken aloud.

decorating cake houses; guiding oranges through the branches; rafting down the river while avoiding obstacles and picking up ingredients. Then they follow the recipes to make the cookies. There are three levels of difficulty and fun printable recipes are included. For Macintosh and Windows.

Pajama Sam Life Is Rough When You Lose Your Stuff! (Atari: <www.us.atari.com>) One of my most favorite computer friends, Pajama Sam is back in a new adventure. This time, lost among the piles

of clothes in his messy room, is his prized comic book. Pajama Sam sets off on a series of adventures in search of his lost comic book. As they come across items, players save them to use at a later time to solve problems. There are also mini-games to play. In the end, Sam finds his comic book and realizes that life wouldn't be so rough if he put away his stuff. Excellent for problem solving, spatial awareness, and interactive play.

Barbie Programs (Vivendi Universal: 800-545-7677, <www.vugames.com>) Many girls in this age range love Barbie and here are some of the new programs that feature her and her friends. **Barbie Horse Adventures: Mystery Ride** takes girls through different locales in search of clues that will help Barbie find the missing horse. Before they start, they practice trotting, herding and jumping. There are different endings so the program varies each time it is played. **Barbie of Swan Lake: The Enchanted Forest** has six locations and players can search for hidden items, paint murals, create a field of singing flowers, do puzzles and matching games, and more. In **Barbie Mermaid Adventure**, players explore undersea worlds while helping Barbie find the dolphins. Girls collect decorations, play seven activities, design jewelry, and compose songs. For boys, there are the **Imaginext Programs** that are good for imaginative play.

Scooby-Doo The Scary Stone Dragon (Riverdeep/The Learning Co: 800-825-4420, <www.learningcompany.com>) This program combines the excitement of a Scooby-Doo adventure with solid educational

activities – a great combination for keeping the attention and motivation of this age group. Players have to find out who is scaring the visitors by gathering clues as they complete the multi-level activities. They guide Scooby through matching doors to find snacks, sort lanterns according to written directions, and follow a written recipe using different ingredients and measurements. Along the way, they'll learn information about Chinese traditions and culture. There are also some off-computer activities.

Powerpuff Girls Princess Snorebucks (Riverdeep/The Learning Co: 800-825-4420, www.learningcompany.com) The Powerpuff Girls have lost their powers and players will help the Girls fight back and regain their strength. They do this by playing math, language arts, and music activities that have five levels of difficulty. The activities are well-designed and fun. Fractions are practiced by deciding how much of the garden needs to be planted. Players unscramble sentences to fix the Powerpuff diaries. There's also an activity to reinforce Spanish Vocabulary. The activities have an auto-leveling feature and also track progress.

Dr. Seuss' The Cat in the Hat (Vivendi Universal: 800-545-7677, <www.catinthehatgames.com> and <www.vugames.com>) This program lets players help tidy up the mess in Conrad and Sally's house before Mom comes home. They find objects all around and must go into them one by one and recapture all the missing things. They use the arrow keys to move the cat, the other keys to blow bubbles, collect objects, jump, bounce, etc and to meet all the other characters from the movie. Available for Windows, PlayStation, GBA and Xbox.

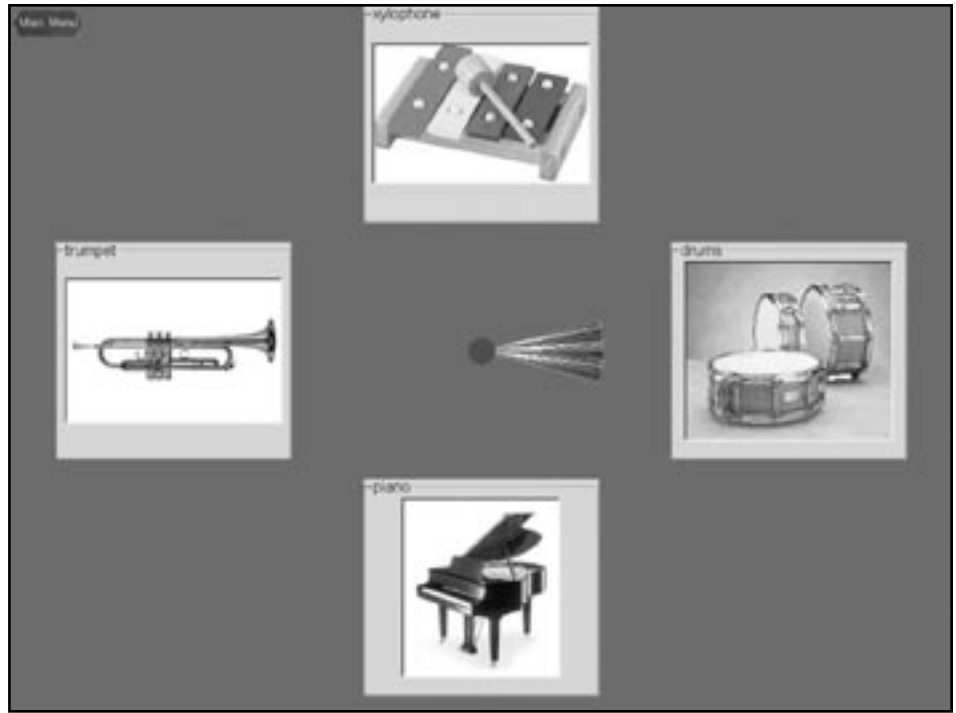
Batman (Riverdeep/The Learning Co: 800-825-4420, <www.learningcompany.com>) In Batman Toxic Chill, players join Batman and Robin as they race to save the city from the Penguin. There are five activities, with multiple puzzles, that stress problem solving, logical thinking, listening skills, etc. Players decipher codes, solve pattern problems, listen and remember a series of instructions, and solve a complex maze. In Batman Toxic Chill, Batman and Robin are again racing against time to save Gotham City. In similar format to the first game, players decipher codes, figure out patterns, use logic to stop a series of overflowing tanks.

Also for Grades K-4, these programs will specifically aid the development of school skills: writing, math, reading, and vocabulary

Storybook Weaver Deluxe 2004 (*Riverdeep/The Learning Co: 800-825-4420, <www.learningcompany.com>*) This classic program has been updated to run on all new Macintosh and Windows computers. Storybook Weaver Deluxe is an open-ended writing tool designed to engage students in the writing process. Students use it to write and illustrate stories using a simple word processor and a variety of graphic features. Choosing from a variety of foreground and background colors and scenes, students create a setting for their story. Then they add objects and pictures to their scene to create an original setting. Objects and pictures chosen can be manipulated, enlarged, reduced, colored, etc. Sounds and music can be added to the main pictures and objects, and the record mode allows students to add a voice recording to any page. Then they can use the word processor to write about their story. The word processor has a spell check, a thesaurus, and text to speech which allows the story to be read aloud. This is an excellent program to use with children from first grade and up.

I Spy Fantasy (*Scholastic:800-724-4718, <www.scholasticstore.com>*) Another great I Spy program, excellent for literacy, visual perceptual skills, language development, and problem solving. Players explore three fantasy worlds (under the sea, an alien planet, a castle) each with unique characters, games and I Spy riddles. Each location has six riddles, hidden in four different places. Players listen to the riddle and then hunt for the objects listed. Upon the completion of each of the groups of riddles, other directions are given to find other objects/keys that will solve the problem. There are three different versions of each of the three adventures, giving a total of 54 different riddles. Great for individual and group play, for all ages.

Math Missions: The Race to Spectacle City Arcade (*Scholastic:800-724-4718, <www.scholasticstore.com>*) Children, K-2, explore the subway, ferry, bus and stores in Spectacle City. They solve math activities such as tangram-like puzzles, setting the clock, filling candy orders (six yellow, one green, two blue, etc.), counting money for the bus, sorting animals by attributes, and more. They will work on counting, adding



Wheel of Sounds (Judy Lynn Software) Press the switch to hear the sounds that objects make.

and subtracting whole numbers, money, weights, measurements, simple fractions, rounding to the nearest ten, and more. There's an Automated Personal Education Tutor to get help and instructions, to view a map of the city, see progress, track money earned, change levels, etc. Once the math problems in each area of the city are completed, the arcade opens and players can spend their earned money on fun games.

Didi and Ditto Kindergarten (*Kutoka: 877-858-8652, <www.kutoka.com>*) In this grade-based program, by the creators of the Mia series, children can play within the story format or just play the fun multi-level activities for math (recognizing numbers, counting objects, adding, solving problems); literacy (recognizing letters, building vocabulary, developing phonic skills, rhyming, following directions, sequencing, spelling); thinking skills (distinguishing between patterns and shapes, memory practice) and coloring and music games.

For this age group, interactive entertainment systems are a very important way of interacting with peers and siblings. One of the newer systems is **Nintendo's Game Cube**. Players have a control pad to move characters up, down, left and right; and several other buttons to create special actions (i.e., jump, talk, start, pause, etc.). Some new and fun programs are: **Finding Nemo**: Nemo, the

clownfish, is lost and players have to help his father and Dory overcome obstacles to get him home safe. Players collect shells, starfish, and press buttons to make the fish dart into objects and carry items. They swim into Bubbles, through bubble rings, and avoid electric eels, slugs, crabs, puffer fish, etc. They will meet all of the characters from the movie. Great fun for all ages. (Also for Windows, GBA and PS2). **Fairly Odd Parents Breakin' Da Rules**: Another group of characters from TV, in this game, players help Timmy find the rule book while collecting stars, cards and crowns. In addition, the program includes eight clips from the TV show and an interview with the show's creator. (Also for GBA and PS2). In **Scooby-Doo Mystery Mayhem**, players capture ghosts, use disguises to hide, solve puzzles, search for clues and explore five environments (a movie set, the wild West, a bayou and a creepy laboratory). Good for beginning players, ages five and up. All are from *Thq, 818-871-5000, <www.thq.com>*. Game Boy Advance programs work both on Game Boy and on Game Cube. The Spyro series from *Vivendi (800-545-7677, <www.vugames.com>*) has several programs that children of this age group like. They include **Spyro: Attack of Rhynocs**, **Spyro Orange** and **Spyro Season of Ice** (all have multi-levels and mini games and puzzles)

and **Thunderbirds** (based on the upcoming movie and featuring exciting missions and fun puzzles).

Some new electronic toys, games, CDs, and books for this age group

The Big Brain Books (*Oregon Scientific: 503-639-8883, <www.oregonscientific.com>*) Both of these books have been selected by the Toy Industry Foundation for inclusion in their guide to exceptional Toys for Children with Special Needs. In the **Big Brain Book Interactive Dictionary**, there are more than 1000 illustrated words. Children touch the images with a special attached pen and hear them named, the part of speech named and a definition, in clear digitized speech. Many also include illustrated sentences (i.e., under..preposition....In a position below or beneath something.... Jenny is under the cow.) There are nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions. In the **Big Brain Book Interactive Encyclopedia**, information is presented in categories, such as Creepy Crawlies, Dinosaurs, Farm, Human Body, Transportation and five others. Children touch the pictures to hear information related to many aspects of the topic (i.e., in Human Body, they can hear about the ear, the digestive system, nervous system, skeletal system, etc.). Both books are 10 inches by 14 inches, have 80 pages, and volume controls and on/off switches. They are excellent literacy tools for ages four through nine, and great for independent and interactive learning.

FunThinkers K-2 with Match-Frame (*Educational Insights: 800-995-4436, <www.educationalinsights.com>*) FunThinkers are big laminated activity books and a Match-Frame with tiles that fit over the page. Children arrange the tiles (numbered 1-16) on the left side. Then they pick up one tile to see the question/pictures. Its answer/match is on the other side and the tile gets put there. When all the tiles have been moved from the left to the right, children can close the Match-Frame and turn it over. The color pattern on the back matches the answer pattern on the page. They can see instantly how many questions they've answered correctly. Some of the activities are: short and long blends, vowel sounds, opposites, rhyming, word to picture match, addition, subtraction, money, time, sequencing, classification, seasons, and more.

My Magnetic Calendar (*Alex: 800-666-2539, www.Alextoys.com*) Here's a great way to teach and reinforce calendar skills. There are magnetic pieces for the months, years, dates (1-31), holidays, and special events (i.e., first day of school, music lesson, birthday, etc.) The 14 ½-inch by 20-inch calendar can be hung on the enclosed hanger. All pieces are displayed on the bottom half and can be moved up to the calendar area as they are needed.

Magnetic Sight Words (*Educational Insights: 800-995-4436, <www.educationalinsights.com>*) This collection includes over 240 sight words and punctuation marks, each about an inch high, and varying in size according to the length of the words. They are black letters, lower case on a white background that are magnetic and can be placed on magnetic boards, file cabinets, refrigerators or other magnetic surfaces. Great for beginning literacy activities, including sentence and story formation, identifying sight words, cloze activities, learning about punctuation and more.

Blink (*Out of the Box, 800-540-2304, www.otb-games.com*) For ages six and up, this is a lightning fast game for two or more. Players match shape, count or color on the cards and the first player out of cards wins. The cards each have different colors, numbers and shapes on them and only one characteristic has to be matched.

WordXchange Junior (*Prodijieux: 866-386-9673, <www.prodijieux.com>*) In this board game, three to six players build words by matching magnetic letter-tiles to word-cards placed all around the board. Each word-card spells out a three letter word as well as suggestions for turning it into a longer or different word (i.e., SIR can be turned into stir, CAR into card, cart, etc.). Each player, by adding at least one letter to an already formed word, can take the word and hold on to it until another player adds to it. The game comes with a Beginner's Word-Card series with 20 word-cards with suggestion words to help players steal their opponent's cards. Excellent way to get young children to focus on reading and word analysis and to enhance literacy skills.

Green Alligators Game (*Vida Games: 866-769-0269, <www.vidagames.com>*) With no reading required, the object is to collect the most cards by correctly guessing the item being described. The deck contains

80 cards with pictures and names of familiar objects. The first player picks any card in their hand and without showing it, describes the object pictured or what the Green Alligator is doing. The other players must try to guess what it is. Fun to play and good for language skills.

GeoSafari Phonics Lab Pre K to 2 (*Educational Insights: 800-995-4436, <www.educationalinsights.com>*) This electronic toy helps children to learn the alphabet, letter sounds and simple three letter words. It contains 26 raised, tactile letter keys with lower case letters. (Upper case letters are printed below). There are seven activities: alphabet song; press any letter and it is named; "Find the letter ..." Players press and light flashes; students press any Letter and the letter, its phonetic sound and a word that begins with that letter is spoken; find the letter that makes a specific sound; and two spelling activities. Included also are word cards and a reproducible book. **Math Whiz** is a hand held electronic toy that's like electronic flash cards. The LCD screen (¼-inch x 2 ½-inch) displays problems and gives tonal reward when correct. Players can select addition, subtraction, multiplication or division. Math Whiz can also be used as a calculator.

Hot Dots Flash Cards (*Educational Insights: 800-995-4436, <www.educationalinsights.com>*) The Hot Dots system contains flash cards and a Hot Dots pen. The flash cards present a problem with choices on the sides. When the Hot Dots pen is placed on the correct answer, it beeps! Each box of flash cards has 50 cards with 100 problems. There are flash cards for addition, subtraction, division, multiplication, telling time, and states and capitals. There are also **Hot Dots BrainBoosters Books** including: Puzzles and Thinking Games, Undersea Adventures, Digging Into The Past and Amazing Animals. When the correct answers are chosen, the pen lights up and makes a cool noise. Great fun and a motivating way to encourage learning while playing.

Hopscotch Hill School (*American Girl: 800-845-0005, <www.americangirl.com>*) This is a series of dolls and early reader books designed to help girls get ready for and develop an awareness of school. Created with an advisory board of educational and child development experts, there are early reader books, 16-inch dolls and classroom-themed play sets. Themes of the books stress sharing, persistence and patience. For example,

Hallie's book (**Hallie's Horrible Handwriting**) tells about her struggles with her handwriting, learning to write and the value of practice. Among the many accessories is the **Castle Carrying Case** that's good for imaginative play and a nice way to keep all the doll's things organized. Other fun learning things from American Girl include: **Coconut Stationery Keepsake** (stationery set that's helpful in encouraging writing); and **Brain Waves Puzzle Book** (riddles, crosswords, mazes, word searches, word games, pencil games, math games, silly riddles and many others. Good to increase vocabulary, enjoy language, and have fun.)

Two Little Sounds: Fun with Phonics and Numbers by Hap Palmer (<www.happalmer.com>) Our favorite, Hap Palmer, is back with a CD collection of original songs that help with reading, writing and math skills. Songs are designed to encourage children to recognize initial and ending consonant sounds, learn about word families and rhyming skills, and understand addition, money and place value. In addition, there are some new lyrics added to familiar favorites (like Apples and Bananas, Five Monkeys) that work with long and short vowels, explore number patterns, counting and subtraction and telling time. Many of the songs also introduce vocabulary (musical instruments, cities-states-countries, clothing, etc.) and encourage motor skills. The included manual has teaching hints, all the words for each song along and follow-up activities.

Reader Rabbit Workbooks (*Learning Co Books*, 800-888-0434, <www.broderbund.com>) This is a series of early learning workbooks that reinforce reading related subjects (letters, sounds, rhyming, etc.) with fun themes. There is a Kindergarten workbook, one for First Grade and several other topic specific workbooks. If you visit the Web site, you can see sample pages from the different workbooks.

Following are some crafts for this age, especially good for fine motor and grapho-motor skills. They also set a context for conversation, turn-taking and pragmatic language skills

Funky Junky Shrink Trinkets: With this fun kit for ages six and up, children draw or trace designs and pictures on plastic film and then punch a hole in them and tie on a string. The plastic gets placed in an oven (adult

supervision required) and the plastic pieces curl and shrink and flatten. Trinkets can be tied to a necklace, keychain, zipper pull or where ever you like. Good for individual or groups – makes about 12 trinkets. It's a fun and fast activity. With **Wild and Wonderful Window Art**, children make stained-glass-like designs. First they pick a design, place a plastic sheet over it, outline it with black and then fill in the design with the five colors. After 24 hours, the design can be peeled off and placed on a window. Good for ages five and up. **Stained Glass Window Art:** This kit contains five real glass shapes (star, heart, oval, diamond and circle), five suction cups with hooks and hanging string. Children decorate the glass shapes with translucent paint – first outlining with black and then filling in with the six colors of translucent paint. The shapes can then be attached to the suction cups and dangled from a window to catch the sun's rays. **Sun Catcher Critters** kit has easy-to-bend aluminum wire that is used to create a critter design or outline a picture of a butterfly, bee, ladybug, etc. Then children fill in the wire-framed spaces with paint and glitter. The paint dries translucent. Critters can be hung up with the suction cups and hanging rings or mounted on wood dowels and put in planters. All from *Creativity for Kids*: 800-311-8684, <www.creativityforkids.com>.

Sand Art: Sand Pictures: Each of these fun kits contains three 5-inch x 7-inch pattern cards that have pre-cut, easy-to-peel adhesive areas. Children peel the picture a section at a time, apply sand from any of ten different colored vials, spread it around with their fingers and then shake off the excess. The end result is a cool, sand picture. Available in three themes: Space, Sandy Lands and Garden. **Mosaic by Color:** These activity kits each contain three color-outlined mosaic cards and sticker sheets with stickers tiles of different colors and shapes. Children peel and stick to complete their pictures. A good motor activity for traveling – interactive fun with no mess. Kits are in three themes: Jungle, Ocean and Garden. **Sticky Bead Pens:** Children just roll the adhesive pens in sticky beads and make their own jewel pens. Good simple, errorless art project with an excellent reward a pen that can be used to practice writing skills. **Creamy Color Doodle Case:** This contains a sturdy nylon zipper case with a storage pouch, 10 gel pens and a 30-page pad of black paper. Great to

carry along on trips or in the car, for writing, playing tic-tac-toe, drawing, and much more. **Fabric Markers:** This is a set of eight brightly colored markers that will decorate T-shirts, totes, sneakers, hats and much more. Markers dry instantly and are permanent. Just apply to pre-washed fabric. All from *Alex*: 800-666-2539, <www.alextoys.com>.

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