



Picture Book Apps: the best new titles

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Selected by Lucy Russell

E-books and all the possibilities they open are here to stay. It is not so long ago that Winged Chariot launched its vision of digital picture books and then Nosy Crow started creating apps to enhance their books. Now more and more publishers are entering the field and the market is growing. However, it can be difficult to decide where to look and what to choose. Lucy Russell provides some guidance in her round-up.

Just Like my Dad

2+/toddler, David Melling, Hodder/Touchoo £1.99

A lovely picture book app for the younger reader, this is a gentle portrayal of a little lion cub and his dad. The father/child relationship is explored with warmth and the pictures and text are accompanied by suitably 'jungly' music. Readers can tap on illustrations for sounds (some of which, like lion burping will delight small children if not parents) and extra animation. A child narrates the story pleasingly, text is highlighted as read and there are options to record your own reading as well.

Classic Winnie-the-Pooh

3+, A. A. Milne ill E H Shepard, Egmont This title free, additional titles £1.99

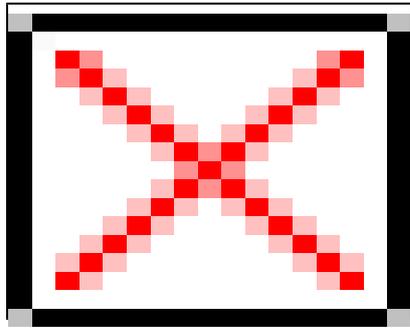
We Are Introduced to Winnie-the-Pooh and Some Bees and the Stories Begin

What a delight for lovers of the original and best **Winnie-the Pooh!** These timeless classics have now been adapted for new technologies whilst maintaining the feel of the originals: this first title in the series does not disappoint. With faithful narration and a 'read by myself' option, gentle music and lots of buzzing sound effects, readers can interact with E H Shepard's illustrations by tapping for simple animations (e.g. Winnie the Pooh falling off the branch), and make characters speak, buzz or grunt as appropriate. Children will enjoy blowing up Christopher Robin's balloon and rolling Winnie-the Pooh in mud. New illustrations appear first in black and white and then the reader watches as they are 'painted' in by an unseen brush. Whilst animations are less sophisticated than other apps available, the levels of interaction are appropriate for the readership and enable full appreciation of the quality of the story.

(Other titles currently or soon to be available include **Pooh Goes Visiting** and **Gets Into a Tight Place** and **Tigger Comes to the Forest and has Breakfast**)

The Berenstain Bears and the Bad Influence

3+, Stan and Jan Berenstain with Mike Berenstain, Oceanhouse Media Introductory price £1.99



The Berenstain Bears is a popular classic US series of stories about a family of bears who learn important lessons about friendship, manners and social responsibility. The American narration may not suit some UK users, but the story is entertaining and simple for younger children—a new friendship leads to a series of unfortunate scrapes for Sister Bear. Some misunderstandings are experienced but quickly resolved with everyone involved learning lessons about taking responsibility for troubles caused by childhood mishaps. The story's narration is accompanied by sound effects of birds, bicycles, giggling and some extra phrases from the characters. Although there is no animation on the pages, when the reader taps on parts of the illustration the object is named aloud and the word appears on screen e.g. trike. This is a useful feature for those developing awareness of text and beginning readers.

The following four titles are all available from Me Books, (mebooks.co) whose claim is that they "wanted to create an app that stays faithful to the experience of enjoying a good book with your children at story time."

These apps are similar in that all have a feature to record and save your own reading and sound effects so they are ideal for well loved stories that children may want to enjoy read aloud to them, or for a parent to record if they may be absent for story time on occasion. Page layout makes it clear that the user is reading a "book" rather than playing a game. Although none have animation, there are many additional "hotspots" which the reader taps to hear extra character comments or sound effects. MeBooks is free to download with a free book, most are then £1.99

The Cow that Laid an Egg

3+, Andy Cutbill ill Russell Ayto, MeBooks/HarperCollins £1.99

Fabulous narration by actress Lisa Jackson perfectly complements this quirky story. Marjorie the Cow feels "ordinary" and so her friends the chickens hatch a plan. Marjorie wakes to find she has "laid" an egg: no longer does she feel ordinary! As her fame grows, the other cows become suspicious but are put in their place when the egg hatches and although looking very much like a chicken, Marjorie's baby definitely moos. Readers tap on the text to have it read (or can read it themselves) and a myriad of hotspots on every page add real wit and enhance the reader's experience, enabling them to immerse themselves in the sounds and feel of Marjorie's world, especially if you get all the chickens squawking at once!

Lettice the Dancing Rabbit

3+ Mandy Stanley, MeBooks/HarperCollins £1.99

This is the gentle and delightful tale of Lettice, a rabbit who longs to be a ballerina. She manages to get to a ballet class, practises hard and becomes the star of the show. But in the end, Lettice realises that being a rabbit, and being with her friends and family is "by far, the very best thing in the world". Readers can tap on hotspots and hear the other rabbits' comments, and sound effects throughout although they perhaps add only a small impact to the overall story.

Love Monster

3+, Rachel Bright , MeBooks/HarperCollins £1.99

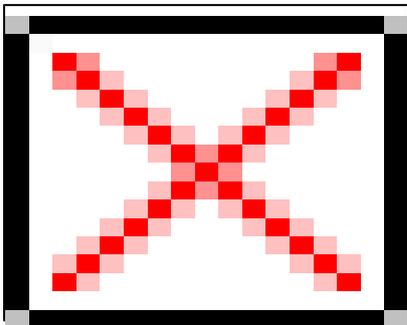
A heart-warming and amusing story of a monster who finds himself unpopular and unappealing in a world of 'cute and fluffy things' and goes out looking for someone to love him: this has the same features as the other MeBooks. Additional text on the pages-signs, labels and the monster's lists are also read aloud when tapped, and worth the read for their amusing contribution. Monster's sighs and grunts add character and feel to the reader's experience and there is a definitely happy and satisfying ending.

I Don't Want To Go To Bed

2+, Julie Sykes ill Tim Warnes, MeBooks/Little Tiger Press £1.99

Little Tiger does not want to go to bed, but when Mummy Tiger says he can stay up all night, he finds it not as exciting as expected. All his friends are going to bed, and when it gets late, he needs a new friend to help him get safely home. This popular story, well-suited for young children in a similar predicament, is narrated as the reader taps on the text and as with the other MeBooks, hotspots throughout add voices to the characters in the illustrations and additional sound effects of the jungle.

Who's in the Loo?



3+, Jeanne Wills ill. Adrian Reynolds, Andersen Press/Robot Media £2.99

Funky music, rhyming text, bright and colourful illustrations are all part of this unashamedly toilet based story. While a queue builds up, the reader speculates as to which of a series of animals are causing the hold up. The sound effects are most definitely not for the faint hearted (such as the rhino who ate a hot curry), but will hold great appeal for many children: the text is considerably more pleasing to the ear and comfortably narrated-not always easily achieved with the sparseness of rhyming text. Tapping triggers animation and sound effects on every page and text is highlighted as it is read: a useful feature for children beginning to read. Users can also record their own narration or sound effects and there are some additional colouring activities.

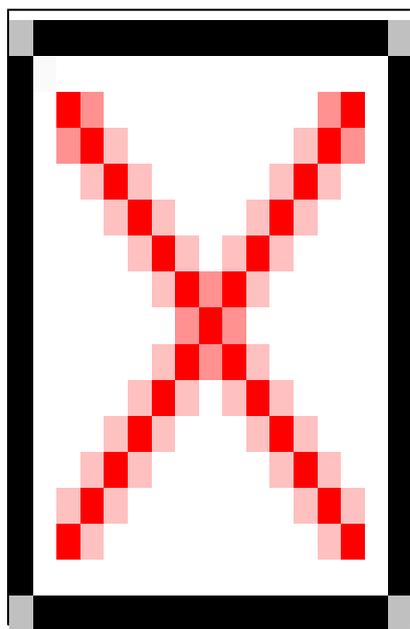
Little Red Riding Hood

3+, Nosy Crow £3.99

Nosy Crow have a reputation for producing high quality apps for young children and this latest title certainly lives up to

expectations. Produced in the same style as **Cinderella** and **Three Little Pigs**, **Little Red Riding Hood** has bright and cheery illustrations, is narrated by children, and has plenty of interaction on every page. Jolly music accompanies the story, hotspots are tapped for extra dialogue, and text can be highlighted as it is read. So far, so good. But where Nosy Crow have differentiated themselves is in developing the levels of interaction available to the child within the story. Readers can zoom in and out of scenes, use a map to jump to different part of the story, and follow instructions given by characters in the scene. In addition, readers can choose their own path through the forest, collecting different items, such as acorns or feathers, sometimes by playing games or completing challenges. These items are then incorporated into the resolution of the story, leading to multiple possibilities for both the narrative and its conclusion: Nosy Crow describe it as 'a 21st Century choose your own adventure?'. The additional skills the reader will begin to develop, such as decision making and understanding of cause and effect will go unnoticed by the child, and this app could be richly exploited to great effect in the classroom or nursery as well as at home. Some may argue it goes beyond the realm of a picture book and undoubtedly children will have a different story experience with this app, but particularly for traditional tales, which are of course retold in myriad forms, it works extremely well.

All the titles reviewed above are all available for iPad. Some may be available for other devices.



Lucy Russell has been a primary school teacher for 16 years and has a keen interest in children's books. She is also the mother of two book-loving children.

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