
SOFTWARE REVIEW

PLAYS FOR CHILDREN

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Title: *Plays for Children*

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Overview

Plays for Children is a CD-ROM programme for children based on five most popular British fairy tales. It consists of stories to be read and listened to, as well as additional games, reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises testing children's knowledge of the stories. The programme allows the choice of four languages (Polish, English, German and French), in which the translation and instructions are supplied.

Description

The programme consists of the following stories:

- "The Little Red Hen,"
- "Goldilocks and the Three Bears,"
- "The Three Billy Goats Gruff,"
- "The Gingerbread Man"
- "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs."

The stories can be chosen from the first screen by clicking on the part of the picture, e.g., on a hen or on dwarfs.

Each story begins as a play. There are native-speaker narrators reading the text. The reading is accompanied by music illustrating the text as well as by sounds of animals, wind, trees or fire.

The text appears on the screen, and it is also read by the narrator. In addition to that, pictures presenting the text are shown, which helps to understand the text. Apart from the narrator, the characters of the plays also speak their parts, which makes it more interesting and

appealing for children. The characters speak the voices of children, which is easier for children to identify with and join the characters speaking. Thanks to that, pupils can take part in the performance if they read the text with the sound off.

The play may go from the beginning to the end, or screen by screen. You may also repeat each part of the text, as well as go back and forward as you wish.

In the left bottom corner there is a “life-belt” icon, which by clicking on it gives the instructions for the activity in students’ native language (chosen at the beginning of the programme). The icon with the flag (right bottom corner) allows the user to get the translation of the text. Next to the “life-belt” icon there is a “ball” icon, allowing students to move to language activities related to the story. The activities are of the following types:

- picture verb games (drag-and-drop)
- True/False (opening the door with either true or false key)
- What’s wrong? (deciding which sentence appears in the text and which not)
- Who says what? (matching sentences with people who said them in the story)
- What is it? (practising the vocabulary from the story)
- Who questions? (similar to “Who says what?”)
- Crossword
- Jumbled text (putting sentences in the correct order on the train)
- Cloze test (putting the right word in the right place of the text)
- Wordsearch (looking for words hidden in a letter maze)

Advantages

1. The stories are beautifully illustrated, in a way which is appealing to children
2. Each story is presented in a theatre with a stage, curtains and audience, which gives the impression of authenticity
3. The texts are read by native speakers with very careful British English pronunciation, which constitutes a good model for learners to reproduce
4. A lot of sound effects, music, animations make the stories more interesting
5. The translations of texts and instructions in four languages make the programme friendly and easy to use even by 6-year-old children
6. The comprehension of the texts is tested by various games and activities

Disadvantages

1. The same melody is played throughout the programme, which can be irritating after some time
2. In exercises section, students' score is not kept, so they do not know how many of their answers were right and wrong
3. In drag-and-drop type of exercises the instruction is "move the words to the right pictures," but only when you move the words inside the picture and not under or over it is the answer evaluated as correct, which may send the misleading message to a student

Recommendation

This programme is easy to use and navigate. It is intuitive because it works the way you might expect it to work, which is important especially for young children who can get easily discouraged. Because knowledge and information is presented in a visually and aurally appealing way, children are motivated to learn by playing with the programme. The multimedia (text, sound, music, pictures, animations) are combined to form an effective whole.

Plays for Children can be used by children aged 6 to 12, both at home and at class, and can be recommended as worth buying.

System requirements

- IBM fully compatible PC with minimum 486DX
 - 4 speed CD-ROM drive
 - 16 MB RAM
 - MS Windows 3.1 or higher
 - sound card
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