

after hours: *family* ○



Orly's Draw-a-Story

At its simplest, Orly's Draw-a-Story is a children's drawing package, and on this level it functions perfectly well. It's got pencil and paintbrush tools which are easy to use while retaining fine control over colour usage, but this is unexceptional.

What is exceptional is that the



This month we join Orly and her Rastafarian frog in a drawing session, review a children's encyclopaedia, and explore a mediaeval castle

disc is presented by a friendly Jamaican girl, Orly, and Lance, a Rastafarian frog.

Given half a chance, Orly will tell you a tale. The twist is that, part way through, she'll ask you to illustrate a scene and your drawing will be seamlessly incorporated in the animation.

This is a great way to encourage creativity, but if it doesn't appeal, the disc can be used as a normal drawing package. Its tools are simple, it has a good range of editable clip-art, and it can be used to write and illustrate your own story. ►

○ family/multimedia news

Disney Interactive has launched two titles to tie in with the recent film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. **The Hunchback Animated Story Book** retells the story of Quasimodo and Esmerelda through animated scenes, together with puzzles and games. **The Hunchback Gamebreak** contains five fun games based on the film, and comes with a free collection of screen savers.

Disney has also announced the third package in its Toy Story range. **The Toy Story Activity Centre** combines games and puzzles into one fun package, and is on sale now for £39.99, while the **Winnie the Pooh Print Studio**, out in

April, lets you make cards featuring Piglet, Eeyore and the rest of AA Milne's characters.

Disney Interactive:
0181 222 1413
www.disney.com

Liris Interactive continues to expand its range of home reference software with the launch of five new titles. These include the **Chambers Encyclopedic Dictionary** and the **Larousse Dictionary of Science and Technology**. Later in the year, they will be joined by Discoveries, a 3D multimedia encyclopaedia.

Liris Interactive: 0171 306 1100

IMSI has released the **Family Health Interactive Library**. It contains six CD-ROMs of health information, including first aid advice and tips on weight loss and stopping smoking.

IMSI: 0181 581 2000

Educational publisher Topologika is converting its software range from the Acorn to the PC. Its latest release is **Talking Nursery Rhymes**, in which children must put a jumbled-up nursery rhyme back together. As a clue, it can be read to them no matter what order the words are in.

Topologika: 01326 377771



After hours family

If you need to familiarise yourself with the drawing tools, the tutorial is one of the best we've seen.

Our one reservation about Orly is her Jamaican accent: some parents might find this a touch hard to understand. Children, though, should get used to it quickly. JS Seeing your own pictures integrated into a story as smoothly as this makes using Orly great fun. It is an excellent introduction to drawing on a PC, and we wish more serious software had such fun tutorials.

£30 suggested retail price
Broderbund: 01429 273029

Orly's Draw-a-Story

Presentation	★★★★★
Ease of use	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

Minimum requirements: PC - 486 processor, Windows 3.1 or later, 8Mb of RAM, 15Mb of hard disk space, 2x CD-ROM drive, sound card, 256-colour display. Mac - Mac or PowerMac, System 7.02 or higher, 8Mb of RAM, 16Mb of hard disk space, 2x CD-ROM drive, 13in monitor, 256-colour display.

The Kingfisher Children's Micropedia

Encyclopaedias on disc are by no means a new phenomenon, but until now there has been little available for children. This Micropedia, which promises accessibility for children aged 5-12, therefore makes a welcome appearance.

When you start the Micropedia, the first thing to do is to choose whether you want level one - for 5-7-year-olds, or level two for 7-12s. Then you go to the contents page, where you will find a variety of topics, such as Animals, History, and Our Earth, or you can choose to see a list of all articles. Non-readers will struggle with the contents page as there are no icons to help them along. You then move onto the alphabetical listing for each topic. Again, there are no icons, but you



can click on a loud-speaker to hear an entry.

At level one the information presented is limited and simple, while level two has more detail. The quality of the content is variable - the section on computers, for instance, talks a great deal about binary numbers, but says little about their application. Other entries are better, with such things as musical excerpts to liven up biographies of musicians. A major complaint is the paucity of pictures, even for entries such as bread and rainbow that one might expect to be easily illustrated.

Despite quibbles as to whether the youngest children could cope with this Micropedia, there are some nice presentation touches. SH

This is a respectable children's encyclopaedia, but overall it has a rather lacklustre feel.

£29.99 inc VAT
Liris Interactive: 0171 306 1100

Children's Micropedia

Presentation	★★★★★
Ease of use	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

Minimum requirements: 386SX, 2Mb of RAM, 256-colour display, Windows 3.1 or higher, sound card, CD-ROM drive.

Dorling Kindersley Castle Explorer

It's a giant step from life in a mediaeval castle to today's multimedia world, but Dorling Kindersley has taken it rather well. Castle Explorer allows children from eight years old to explore a castle, learning about life there as they go.

You choose between being a young page, or disguised as the king's spy, to unmask the treacherous Baron Mortimer. If you opt to be a spy, you'll have to explore the nooks and crannies of the castle to uncover information - and risk being thrown into the dungeon if you're found out - while as a page, it's up to you how much exploring you do.

You navigate the castle using a series of cutaways, complete with hidden passageways and hotspots to link you to snippets of interesting information. There are also a number of 3D rooms to explore using interactive videos. In these you meet some of the castle's residents, including the baron himself.

In the chained library, half a dozen illustrated books teach you about society, warfare, food and more: they're well written and impressively detailed. JS

Castle Explorer is excellent. It combines a lot of detailed information with attractive graphics, but would have benefited from a less complicated interface. Even so, it's the next best thing to actually visiting a castle.

£29.99 (inc VAT)
Dorling Kindersley Multimedia: 0171 753 3488

Castle Explorer

Presentation	★★★★★
Ease of use	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

Minimum requirements: PC - 486DX33, 8Mb of RAM, Windows 3.1 or later, 8-bit sound card, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA display. Mac - 68LC030 25MHz, 8Mb of RAM, System 7 or later, 2x CD-ROM drive, 256-colour display at 640x480.

