

after hours: *family*

At home this month you can read the story of Winnie the Witch or swot up to improve your vocabulary with the Children's Dictionary. In the project, you get a chance to become a musician

Winnie the Witch

This is a new multimedia animated storybook from OUP, following the successful release last year of *The Fish Who Could Wish*.

The story of Winnie the Witch is narrated by comedienne, Sandi Toksvig, and illustrated by Korky Paul. It's a simple tale. Everything in Winnie's home is completely black

including her cat, Wilbur. He's so hard to spot that Winnie trips over him or sits on him. Winnie sets out to try to solve this problem.

From the main screen, you can either explore the rooms of Winnie's house, watch a six-minute animated film of the story or have the story read to you page by page. The only chance to inter-

act comes when you explore the house. There are a lot of hot spots to click on in each room. Hot spots produce sound and animation clips which are inventive and funny. If you click on Winnie's wand, you get 'magical powers' which let you do different things in each room. You have to concentrate to ensure that these work as you want – in the kitchen, I tried to concoct a spell to make Wilbur shrink but forgot an ingredient and he ended up growing enormous. RS

A CD that looks good, plays well and provides lots of fun for children aged 5-10 years old.

○ £29.99
○ OUP: 01865 267815

Winnie the Witch

Enjoyment	1	2	3	4	5
Ease of use	1	2	3	4	5
Value for money	1	2	3	4	5

Minimum requirements: 33MHz 486SX, 8Mb of Ram, CD-Rom drive, Dos version 5.0 Windows 3.1 or later.



family/multimedia news

Pearson New Entertainment has launched a quarterly science fiction magazine on CD-Rom. *SFX-CD* costs £6.99 from newsagents. Watch out for a sports magazine next year. *Pearson New Entertainment: 0171 331 3920*

Vtechsoft – the interactive branch of Vtech, a toy supplier – has released **Alphabet Workshop**. It's the first in a series of products aimed at 3-6 year olds. Following closely behind will be **Numbers Workshop** and **Colours and Shapes Workshop**, costing £29.99 each. For the same age group, Europress has put **Goldilocks and the Three Bears** on CD-Rom. This extends the Read and Play range, where each CD is priced at £19.99. *Vtechsoft: 01235 555545. Europress: 01625 859333*

Penguin Electronic Publishing has a mixed bag on offer. For children, there's the **Magic World of Beatrix Potter** – an interactive biography which uncovers the author's letters and journals and includes games

and puzzles – and **The Adventures of Tom Kitten and Jemima Puddleduck**. For jazz lovers, **The Penguin Guide to Jazz** offers reviews, biographies, excerpts, album covers, photographs and video clips with a release date of 31st October. Finally, for £49.99, you can buy **The Penguin Hutchinson Reference Library**, which is a collection of seven reference works on one CD. *Roget's Thesaurus*, the *Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, the *Hutchinson Concise Encyclopedia* and the *Longman Dictionary of the English Language* are included. *Penguin Electronic Publishing: 0171 416 3000*

The **Collins French Dictionary** is now available on CD, containing 300,000 references and 550,000 translations. The price is £64.63. *HarperCollins: 01903 873555*

Miscellaneous releases include **Sources of Faith** – an introduction to the seven major religions of the world from McGraw-Hill. **Lose Weight The French Way!**, from IMSI, claims to make you shed pounds without cutting or counting calories. *McGraw-Hill: 01628 23432; IMSI: 0181 581 2000.*



Project

The Music Maker program on this month's cover disk (see the multimedia section of the disk) is a kind of Lego set for composers, letting you build up a piece of music from pre-recorded 'samples'. You could add a sound track to a video, make up your own jingles, or compose a backing track to practise an instrument to.

First, select the New Arrangement icon. The default option is eight tracks, but with stereo sound this means you can hear four samples simultaneously.

Now select a sample from the list on the left of the screen, and drag it into position on the grid (it doesn't matter which level you put it on). Clicking on a sample lets you hear it first. The demo has only 29 samples, drawn from more than 1,000 on the full product.

You can create four-square blocks of music where all the elements start and finish together, or overlap them, starting some phrases off the beat. Don't feel you have to fill all eight tracks all the time. The most interesting music comes and goes, rather than banging on all the way through.

Most of the samples are a standard length, or multiples of this, and a standard tempo. The Tempo control only affects the length of the measures in the grid, it doesn't change the speed of the music.

Although most of the tracks are essentially rhythmic, many are tuned, so try to match the keys of any tuned tracks you select. You don't need Grade 8 theory for this, just do it by ear. You play the music using the icons on the toolbar or by hitting the spacebar. Moving the start (S) and end (E) arrows lets you hear just part of the piece.

To perform basic editing, select a sample and click on

the little boxes (handles) that appear at the corners and centre.

Top left and top right make the sound fade in or out (drag to where you want the fade to start or finish). The top centre handle controls the volume, and bottom left and right determine the start and finish of the sample. Dragging it out to twice its length makes it repeat.

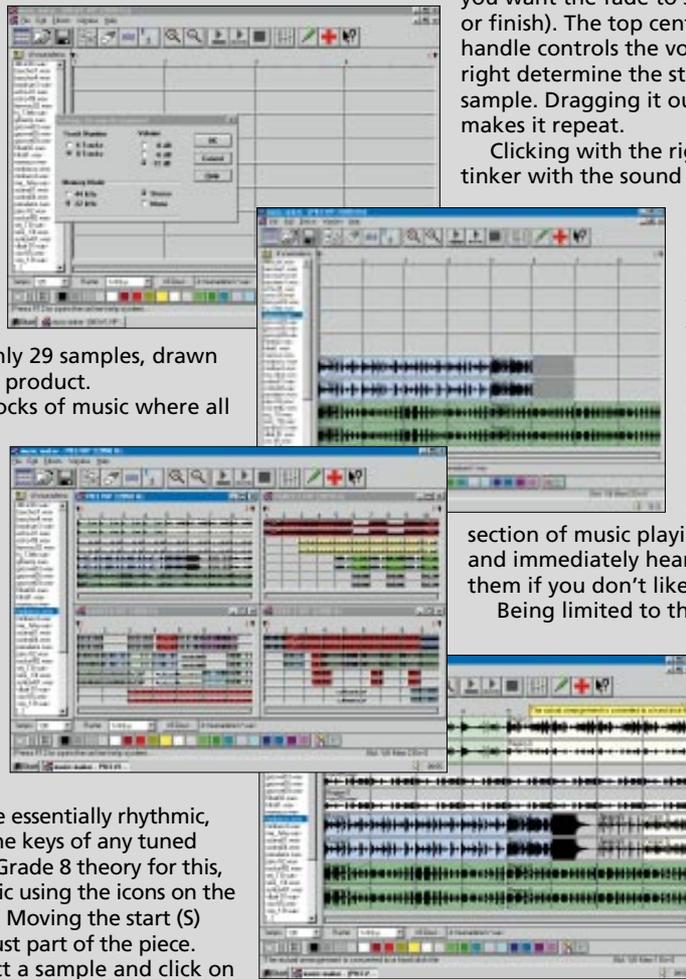
Clicking with the right mouse button lets you tinker with the sound of a sample or group of samples – distorting, altering the reverb and echo, filtering, even playing it backwards. If your ear is really acute, the Gater option lets you edit tiny slices of a sample. Don't overdo the effects, or your music will sound like a badly oiled car-crusher.

You can make changes on the hoof – leave a section of music playing while you edit samples and immediately hear the results (and Undo them if you don't like them!).

Being limited to the samples that are

supplied, the best you can produce within Music Maker is a kind of backing track. To add recorded vocals, a MIDI file, or a video sequence, use the Media Link option. You can Export your compositions as a standard WAV file, so they can be played using any PC sound software.

Paul Bray



The Dorling Kindersley Children's Dictionary

My First Incredible Amazing Dictionary was released a couple of years ago to great acclaim. It was aimed at four-to-seven year-olds and featured over 1,000 words and definitions. Now there's the Children's Dictionary which is for the next age group – seven-to-twelve year-olds – and which has 14,500 headwords and pronunciations and 45,000 definitions.

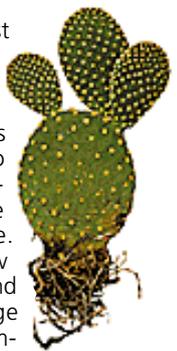
These figures alone suggest it will be a useful dictionary but on top of this, the interface is attractive and intuitive. There's a variety of ways to find words – the Word Finder, Word Wheel and the A-Z.

The Word Finder is a standard search engine – you type in a specific word and are taken straight to a definition. The Word Wheel lets you locate words

similar to the one you're looking at and the alphabet always sits across the top of the screen. Each letter has a home screen where everything is 'live'.

Other features are Word of the Day, Random and Word Detective, which all encourage the user to browse through the dic-

tionary rather than just looking for specific words as a means to an end. Whichever word you're looking at, there's always the option to go back or forward alphabetically through the dictionary from there. Finally, there are a few games like hangman and charades to encourage good spelling and comprehension.



RS

This is a good-quality dictionary for children. It's visually attractive and packed with information.

- £29.99
- Dorling Kindersley: 0171 753 3488

Children's Dictionary

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