

Teach your monster to read.

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This is an excellent online, free, early phonics, games program for Windows and Mac, with an app coming soon.

<http://www.teachyourmonstertoread.com/>

Free.

Sponsored by publisher the Usborne Foundation, featuring Simon Farnaby of BBC's *Horrible Histories* and Mr Thorne of *Mr Thorne does Phonics*. All the details and contents are shown on the web. There are demonstration extracts, but it is very easy to register, invent a pupil, and try out the full program.



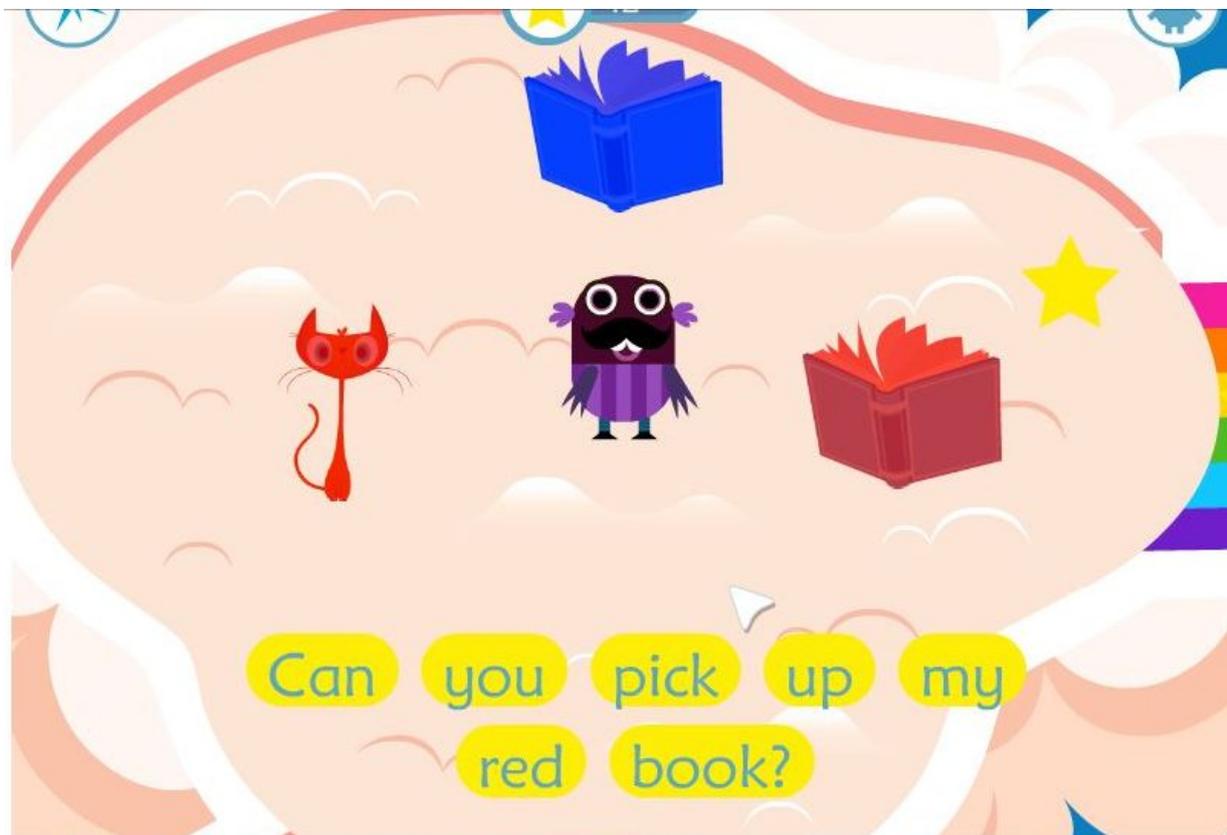
You hear the instruction, "Put the ducks in the 'oo' pond".

Early phonics.

The program follows the Government Letters and Sounds, phases 2, 3 and 4, for children aged 5 to 8 years, (probably with more to come). The progression is not ideal for dyslexic children, but the developers could not do otherwise.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letters-and-sounds>

1. **First Steps** introduces single letter sounds and the 'flossy' doubles, ck, ff, ll, ss, zz, with relevant regular words and a few tricky words.
2. **Fun with Words** covers
 - **graphemes:** ch, sh, th (2 sounds), ng, ai, ee, igh, oa, oo (2 sounds), ar, or, ur, ow, oi, ear, air, ure, er
 - **tricky words:** he, she, the, to, we, me, be, was, no, go, my, you, they, her, all, are, said, so, have, like, some, come, were, there, little, one, do when, out, what.
 - **consonant blends** (without specific tuition), relevant, useful, **regular words** (not listed), and **sentences**.



You hear, "Read the sentence out loud, and tell your monster what to do".

From "Get the cat," it gradually builds up to an instruction that has 15 words in two sentences.

Tasks cover **decoding** for reading and **encoding** for reinforcement and towards spelling, and **comprehension**.

Monster never uses sounds not yet taught and very rarely introduces tricky words not yet taught. It showed 'what' and 'my' without having taught them, but did not use them, i.e. they were red herrings. It did use 'when' before teaching it.

Learning.

Of course, the reviews say that children love it, but some games programs have more playing than learning. Monster has an excellent balance. The supervising adult can see the competence score for each grapheme, the number of times played and the total time taken so far. So the adult can offer reinforcement work for any weak areas.

Games.

The learner starts at the beginning and go all the way through each journey. You can stop at any time, and the program remembers where you left it. Then there are 16 islands for optional further enjoyment and reinforcement.

Children can choose from a good variety of game tasks, which nearly all involve word work. All the monsters are friendly. No games are punitive by time restraints or urge to speed. Well, there is one DS box style activity, in which I could not make my monster jump, but I did not have to choose that game and could exit from it. I am sure my grandchildren would be able to do it!

2. Fun With Words

Total play time: 03:28.10

Total plays: 6

Katy has completed the game!

Grapheme	Competence
s	100%
a	100%
t	95%
p	100%
i	80%

If you make a mistake, you hear or see the target item again. Error items are reinforced interactively as the task progresses. You have to get it right in order to move on.

It is good that one can turn off the annoying, repetitive music.

What it does not do.

It does not teach letter names or the alphabet sequence. There is no letter formation, or use of the keyboard for spelling.

There are no meanings for confusable words, e.g. fort.

Concerns.

The program uses capital letters in sentences, without having taught them.

It is fine to teach 'c as in cat', but when introducing 'k' immediately afterwards, the program needs to say, "Here is another letter that has the /k/ sound." And for 'ck', we need, "And when these letters are together they also have the sound /k/." Ditto for the flossies, and for 'er' and 'ur'. Long ago, a nine year old boy learned 'ee' and relevant words at school. Later he learned 'ea'=/ee/. He started writing 'trea, frea' etc. He thought he had been spelling 'tree, free' etc. wrongly, because no one had explained the alternative spelling.

Nothing is said about when we write 'c' or 'k' or 'ck', but then there are no rules for 'er' and 'ur', nor when we read 'th' as in this or in thing, or 'oo' as in moon or in book.

I could not hear the 's' and 'ss' sounds, and had some difficulty with 'l' and 'll', but I have a slight hearing loss. Supervising adults would need to check that children could hear the sounds and words clearly.

Conclusion.

I do hope that the developers are working on the next phases of literacy development.