



KEVIN O'NEILL /
STAFF ARTIST

Read all about it

Electronic books celebrate Christmas

This is the second in a series of columns covering Christmas-themed apps for the iPad.

Kids love books. The iPad is an ideal platform not only on which to read books, but also to enhance them by adding animation and interactivity. Here are some Christmas book apps.

Visit from St. Nicholas

There are many apps that retell Clement Clarke Moore's classic Christmas poem in a variety of ways. I tried two that took very different approaches.

The first one, **The Night Before Christmas**, is from The Directors Bureau and is very traditional in its approach. It features beautiful illustrations by Pixar animator Lauren Airriess in a straightforward, picture-book format. The only interactivity or animation in it are the page swipes and the parchment scrolls that unroll to reveal the words on each page.

You can play the prerecorded narration or read the story yourself. Kids will enjoy this for the timeless prose and the wonderful images.

The second app I looked at, **Pop Out! The Night Before Christmas**, is from Loud Crow Interactive Inc. This one is definitely designed to take advantage of the iPad's interactive abilities.

The illustrations are very well done in this app, too, and they're also animated. There is motion on every page and almost everything you

touch sings, jingles or laughs as it moves about the page.

The narrator's voice and inflection are perfect for the tale, and the words light up as he speaks to help young readers follow along. I tried the free version which doesn't have the entire story but, based on what I saw, \$4.99 for the full app is well worth it.

More than nice story

The interactive, electronic book app **Christmas Tale HD** should be a hit with young children. It's a richly illustrated story about Santa bringing gifts on Christmas.

Each full-screen image contains several interactive elements for kids to discover. They can make toys move, light up the Christmas tree, make kids throw snowballs and more as they listen to the story being read to them by the app. The words light up as they're spoken so beginning readers can follow along with the story.

The app also features a countdown to Christmas, a wish list that kids can send to Santa, or a friend, and a tree that can be decorated and emailed to friends. While the story is not likely to become a Christmas classic, young believers should find the app entertaining.

Crayon time

Christmas Coloring Book! is exactly what the name implies. There are 20 pages of Christmas-themed line drawings that can be colored in with virtual crayons. There's even a blank page so young artists can create their own scenes.

A wide range of different colored crayons are available at the touch of a finger. There are options to color

with the crayons or to use a bucket to fill large areas in one click. You can also choose between coloring "freeform" or being constrained to staying in the lines. There's an eraser to fix little mistakes, or you can shake your iPad to clear all the color from the screen.

The colored pictures can be saved to a gallery, emailed, saved to a photo album or posted on Facebook, Tumblr or Twitter.

It's a kid-friendly app that operates with the simplicity of an actual coloring book.

Keep wee ones busy

Christmas Activity Book is an educational app brought to you by Baby-First, a television network for babies and toddlers. It features more than a dozen Christmas-themed games designed to help kids learn colors, numbers and more.

The artwork for the games is bright and colorful, and the large navigation buttons should make it easy for small hands to control the action. Cheerful Christmas music and playful sound effects complete the package.

Kids can complete jigsaw puzzles, build a snowman, help Santa deliver presents and more. All the games are interactive, which will help your tykes develop hand-eye coordination as they play.

All of the apps this week appeal mostly to the very young. Next week, I'll review some Christmas game apps that will cover a wider range of ages, from toddlers to teenagers, and maybe even some adults.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.



KEVIN O'NEILL

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