

28 May 2008

By: Iulia Ivan, Mac Editor



Kidspiration

[Kidspiration, Your Personal Mary Poppins](#)

Be sure your kid is prepared for anything that may come...

As a parent most of the troubling experiences are connected to your child's education. What school he should attend, a private one or a public one, and then what courses and so on. What I mean is that everybody has to learn to read and to write but is math more important than music? Should you try educating your offspring by means of games or are the traditional methods still a better choice? Primary education has, of course, a great importance, being the milestone of your kid's proper upbringing but how can you be sure that he has every opportunity to develop appropriately? The best you can do is to make sure that he is prepared for anything that may come. That is why a program created especially to develop kids' numeracy, literacy and thinking skills using visual learning might be everything you've been searching for. **The Looks** Designed for kids, age four to ten, the interface of Kidspiration is very colorful and easy to use. The main window shows you the different features and tools that are either grouped on a subject, like numeracy, literacy, science and history, or on an action like picture view, word view or math view. All of this is supposed to help you visually organize your thoughts or observe a problem from a different angle. Visual learning, which implies associating words with images in order to graphically represent your ideas, is proved to be a very useful method, especially when brainstorming, and this is the basic concept for this software. When you open a category, a startup window appears and you see what exercises are available for every subject. If you put the cursor over an option a voice explains you what the button does and this happens with everything that is written, no matter if it is a button or something you just wrote. **The Works** Kidspiration is really easy to install but to make sure it runs properly you must have at least a Macintosh G3 300 MHz or faster and 192 MB RAM. Once you reached the main window you find your way through the program without any problems. No matter what exercise you may choose, every window has a toolbar that offers easy access to all the features. The most interesting option is probably the Symbol Library tool formed by over 3000 images. This Symbol Library is available for each exercise, usually on the left part of the window, and you also have the possibility to search through it in order to get the perfect image. Using this option involves only a drag and drop to the desired location. You can also create your own images and export them later as bitmap, JPEG, GIF or HTML file. Of course, to every image you can add a note or link it to another concept and you can even create hyperlinks. On the top of the window you have the formatting toolbar that allows you to organize any kind of text you wish, but you may also switch to writing view - the translation is made by clicking on a single button. The purpose is to pair images and words and the visual continuity between Picture View and Writing View tries to underline the link between image and written expression. The purpose is to develop kids' solving problem skills. The word guide feature is also very useful. Not only that it offers an explanation for the word but it also gives examples and synonyms making sure that the full meaning is disclosed, bringing great improvement to the vocabulary. Children can also record their line of thoughts in order to remember how they got to a conclusion. This makes it easier to detect the flaw in their reasoning, if that is the case. They can also listen while a text is read to them developing word recognition and comprehension. The math view, which functions independently, offers six working spaces: Kidspiration Color Tiles - the student learns to count, add, multiply, subtract and divide; Pattern Blocks - composing and decomposing shapes, the child observes their properties and learns about patterns; Base Ten Blocks - helps him understand numbers by counting, comparing, grouping, partitioning and creating whole numbers; Fraction Tiles - a tool to make them understand fractions by arranging tiles of different sizes; Fraction Boxes -

graphically represent fractions and Free Space where they can develop whatever they want. In the Math View start up window, if the Use Steps feature is selected, a document is broken in multiple steps in order to show the progression of a problem resolved with the same tool, instead of using multiple functions. In every window on the left side of the space a Math palette is available and at the bottom a toolbar for formatting the text. **The Good** Kidspiration is one of the most interesting educational software applications I've seen designed for this age. The audio explanations are very helpful, making it suitable even for kids who don't necessarily know how to read. The program definitely stimulates the child in every aspect, making him solve problems, develop projects and link concepts, bumping into things that he might not use every day. The fact of the matter is that this application isn't necessarily useful only for kids, but it can also be used for organizing events, web pages, projects, brainstorming, almost every activity that may be better if you visualize it first. **The Bad** Although at a first glance you think this program is very simple and easy to use, it takes a little time to explore and get used to all its features and patterns. **The Truth** Kidspiration is not going to transform your child into a rocket scientist but it will help him better organize himself and his projects, while the attractive interface will actually keep him in front of the computer doing something fun and educational. *Here are some snapshots of the application in action:*