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News and Notes from the Workshop
Posted by Jordan Brown

SESAME FAMILY NEWSLETTER---Kids and Computers
July 23, 2003

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***ALL KEYED UP

Next to splashing in puddles and teasing Satchmo (our cocker spaniel), my 2-and-a-half-year-old son's favorite activity is playing on the computer. Finian (Finn for short), discovered our computer about six months ago. At first, he banged the keyboard randomly, enjoying the clickety-clack sounds, and watching the letters pop up on the screen. Picking a really HUGE font, I quickly learned, was a fun way for Finn to easily see each letter as he typed it in.

Once Finn got the hang of tapping out letters, I introduced him to the computerized voices that accompany SimpleText (a word processing program that comes on most computers these days). This funny program can read aloud any words or letters in a variety of voices, with silly names like Boing, Bubbles, Hysterical, Fred, Deranged, and Whisper. Just listening to the mechanical voices read aloud "hahahahaha," or "no-no-no-no," or his name, sends Finn into hysterics. (I hope Finn forgets this feature by the time he is aware of certain four-letter words.)

As one would expect, Finn is learning a lot by playing with the computer--fine motor skills, concentration, letter recognition--but one of the unexpected benefits, is that he is learning to talk. Soon after he figured out how to use the computer, my wife Ellen and I realized that Finn knew how to say the word "on." But he'd say it rarely, and rather timidly. So, to encourage him to speak, we explained that he had to say "on" before we would push the power button. The first time we tried this, he just sat there, staring at the screen, frustrated. We reassured him that he could try again later. The very next day, Finn got our attention, pointed to the computer, grinned, and shouted "ON!" Of course, we complied with his wishes. Little did we know what we were getting into...

Fun as it is to watch Finn use the computer; I began to wonder whether I should be encouraging this activity. Wasn't he better off spending that time at the playground, or drawing with crayons? Would his staring at the computer screen harm his vision? To put my mind at ease, and to learn how to make the most of our computer time together, I read these articles from the experts at Sesame Workshop.

COMPUTERS AND KIDS

Make sure your child comes out a winner in the new electronic

playground.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=74280>

NONSENSE!

Our expert pokes holes in four common myths about kids and computers.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=779>

THE EYES HAVE IT

Protect your kids from eyestrain while they're online.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=94345>

AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO KIDS' BEST COMPUTER USE

An age-by-age guide to help you choose software that's best for your child.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=74360>

***LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

My parents shared with me a funny story about when our family visited the Luray Caverns in Virginia. As the tourists wandered through the mysterious caves, the lights suddenly went dark. Everyone panicked, and huddled close together, worried that they might fall off the narrow path. When the lights returned a few minutes later, my parents realized what had happened. Their son (me), in my father's back carrier, had noticed a light switch on the wall, and decided to try it out.

Finn has clearly inherited my childhood passion for pushing buttons. He loves to flip light switches, the remote control for the TV, the ON/OFF switch for the ceiling fan, and many more. For Finn, like most kids, pushing buttons is fun because it makes something happen-- again, and again, and AGAIN. In terms of his interest in computers, I suspect he also enjoys playing with a "toy" that belongs to Mom and Dad.

As much as Ellen and I want to encourage Finn to explore the world, we also want to keep him out of trouble. As he gets older, and discovers the fun of e-mail and the Web, we plan to make sure that his time online is safe and sound. For helpful tips about kids and the Internet, check out these Sesame Workshop articles.

INTERNET SAFETY GUIDELINES

Create a safe online experience for your children.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=56800>

CRUISE CONTROL

Teach your child these simple rules before they begin their online adventures.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=56780>

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CHILD IS SURFING?

Teach your kids these important tips for protecting himself online.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=74344>

SAFETY SOFTWARE

Learn about some software that blocks inappropriate Web sites.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=56840>

***ELMO'S ONLINE WORLD

Finn has been watching Sesame Street since he was about 1 year old. Until the day that he accidentally broke our VCR (remember his passion for pushing buttons?), he enjoyed watching videos of his favorite Muppets, too. So, when I introduced him to Sesame Workshop.com at age 2, he was thrilled to discover pictures of Elmo, Big Bird, and Cookie Monster. He laughed when he heard their familiar voices. At first, Finn was especially fond of a particular "lapware" game in which toddlers press any key on the keyboard, and Elmo and other Muppets respond by popping out to say "peek-a-

boo!"

PEEKABOO: A LAPWARE GAME FOR PARENT AND BABY
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=4203178>

Finn has since moved on to more advanced skills than clicking buttons. Now he's figured out how to work the mouse--moving the cursor around the screen wherever he wants to click. Since our dog is a big part of Finn's life, he enjoys helping Mr. Noodle round up dogs to walk in Mr. Noodle's Walking the Dogs game. Finn also loves to play the Make Elmo a Hat game. My wife and I marvel at his eye-hand coordination, and how he figures out by himself how these games work.

MR. NOODLE'S DOG WALKING GAME
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=111180>

ELMO AND DOROTHY IMAGINE WACKY HATS
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=111260>

ELMO'S ANIMAL FOOTPRINTS GAME
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=111280>

As Finn starts to learn about letters and the sounds they make, I'm sure he'll get a kick out of Sesame Workshop's brand new keyboard game featuring Elmo. In this game, Elmo encourages kids to tap a letter to see what that letter looks and sounds like. Then he gives an example of something that starts with that letter.

KEYBOARD-O-RAMA
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=9495524>

***HOMEMADE COMPUTER GAMES

To personalize Finn's computer experiences, I use a multimedia program called HyperStudio. It allows me to create simple games featuring photos and sounds of my son's favorite things--family and friends, the moon, airplanes, bananas and so on. These homemade games have buttons that enable you to record different sounds, from Finn laughing hysterically to my wife saying his favorite words in silly ways ("Uuuup...Dooooown").

Finn has discovered how to make the sounds "stutter" by clicking the mouse over and over again. Using a similar method, he's figured out how to stop and start the animations.

You certainly don't need a multimedia program to personalize your child's experiences with the computer. In fact, another one of our favorite computer activities is to simply search the Internet for pictures of things he likes. Many of the photos we printed out are now on the walls of his room. When my sister called to say that Finn's cousin was obsessed with airplanes, Finn and I mailed him a bunch of plane photos we found online.

If you find the Internet a confusing, intimidating place, you'll find comfort and tips in this Sesame Workshop article.

UNTANGLING THE WEB
Four families try to figure out the Internet.
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=1038>

***SESAME STREET MUSIC WORKS

For Finn, playing the piano keys is almost as much fun as tapping the computer keys. To encourage his dual interest in music and computers, Sesame Workshop offers a variety of interactive educational games. For example, in the Musical Places area of Sesame Street Music Zone, Finn has a blast listening to "Oh Susannah" sung in animal sounds by a cow, pig, duck and sheep. As he gets older, there are many more sophisticated games on this site

for Finn to play with sounds, and learn about different instruments.

SESAME MUSIC ZONE

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=111041>

***LOGGING OFF...FOR NOW

Now that summer is here, Finn is spending less time in front of the computer. As engaging as computer games are, he would much prefer to run through a sprinkler, or play on the swings. But I'm sure that as soon as it rains--and we're stuck inside--Finn will grab my hand, pull me to the computer and shout, "On, Daddy, on!"

***SESAME STREET BEAT

It's karaoke night at Hooper's and everyone is getting ready to sing. Telly is nervous, but Baby Bear encourages him to give it a try. Telly listens to everyone sing, but isn't sure he can do it.

Will Telly take the stage? Check your local PBS station to find out when this episode is airing where you live. Then get groovin' with these activities.

PBS KIDS: WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=9697605>

THE NUMBER OF THE DAY IS 7

Count Ernie's seven flowers in this printable.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=3104>

SESAME STREET RADIO

Listen to 100 of Sesame Street's greatest hits while you play on [sesamestreet.com](http://www.sesamestreet.com)!

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=105602>

ELMO'S DANCE PARTY

Kids get happy in this body rockin' activity.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/gwr?s=nl&t=20700>

Time for some Sesame Trivia!

How many Grammy Awards has Sesame Street won?

- A. 2
- B. 4
- C. 6
- D. 8

What do you think? There have been dozens of classic songs over the years, and for them, Sesame Street has won a total of eight (D) Grammys!

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