

The Best Gifts for Kids The 2006 National Parenting Publications Awards For Children's Products Part II



Following up on Part 1 of our 2006 NAPPA coverage of Gold Award-winning Toys, DVDs and CDs in November, this month we feature the outstanding Children's Books, Storytelling & Spoken-Word Recordings, and Software & Video Games. Let NAPPA be your handy holiday

shopping guide for choosing age-appropriate gifts that are sure to bring hours of fun and discovery to the children in your life. Our expert judges tested (and kid-tested) nearly 900 entries to bring you these gems.

NAPPA Honors and a Ready-to-Go Shopping List

For the past 16 years, NAPPA has stringently evaluated and recognized thousands of Children's Products and Parenting Resources to help you select the best products for your family. In addition to the NAPPA Gold winners featured here, you'll find more must-try products among the NAPPA Honors winners on the Web. You can print or email a Holiday Shopping List and see coverage of last year's NAPPA winners, too. All at www.NAPPA.Parenthood.com.

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In Last Month's Issue:

- Toys
- DVDs
- Music

Books

By Helen Foster James, Ed.D. and Kathleen Krull

This year's NAPPA winners herald the

return of favorite characters and announce the grand entrance of new ones in stories that make you laugh, think and wonder. Happy reading!

For Babies & Toddlers

• *Messages from the Heart: My Blanket*, by Sandra Magsamen; Little, Brown; 2006; \$14.99. This beautifully stitched book opens into a cuddly, baby-sized quilt.

• *Mommy Hugs*, by Karen Katz, McElderry, 2006, \$12.95. Mommy and baby cuddle and count.

• *Tinkle, Tinkle, Little Tot: Songs & Rhymes for Toilet Training*, by Bruce Lansky, illustrated by Anne Catharine Blake, Meadowbrook, 2006, \$12.95. Humorous motivation for toilet learning. Includes a CD.

• *Your Personal Penguin*, by Sandra Boynton, Workman, 2006, \$6.95. A perky board book with endearing lyrics to a song you can download.

For Preschoolers & Kindergarteners

• *A Place Called Kindergarten*, by Jessica Harper, illustrated by G. Brian Karas, Putnam, 2006, \$15.99. Children feel comforted as they read how farm animals turn from loneliness to understanding as a child heads off to school.

• *Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late!* by Mo Willems, Hyperion, 2006, \$12.99. Our favorite pigeon doesn't want to go to bed in this familiar dilemma.



For Ages 6 & Up

• *Dooby Dooby Moo*, by Doreen Cronin, illustrated by Betsy Lewin, Atheneum, 2006, \$16.95. Farmer Brown's clever animals create laugh-out-loud fun at the county fair's talent show.

• *Ella Sets the Stage*, by Carmela D'Amico, illustrated by Steven D'Amico, Levine/Scholastic, 2006, \$16.99. Ella the Elephant's school is holding a talent show, but Ella doesn't think she has any talent.

• *Flotsam*, by David Wiesner, Clarion, 2006, \$17. An exquisite, wordless fantasy about a boy and the camera he finds on the beach, like so much flotsam.

• *The Flower Ball*, by Sigrid Laube, illustrated by Silke Leffler, Pumpkin House, Ltd., 2006, \$15.95. A quirky, radiant story about prejudice between vegetables and flowers, whimsically resolved at a dance.

• *Olivia Forms a Band*, by Ian Falconer, Atheneum, 2006, \$17.95. Everyone's favorite diva returns to form a band.

• *The Paper Bag Princess, 25th Anniversary Ed.: The Story Behind the Story*, by Robert Munsch, illustrated by Michael Martchenko, Annick Press, 2005, \$19.95. Explore the background of this popular book; original story included.

For Ages 9 & Up

• *Andy Warhol: Pop Art Painter*, by Susan Goldman Rubin, Abrams, 2006, \$18.95.

This beautifully designed book focuses on Warhol's childhood, determination and rise in popularity.

• *Clementine*, by Sara Pennypacker, illustrated by Marla Frazee, Hyperion, 2006, \$14.99. Narrated by exuberant, disaster-prone, lovable Clementine, this witty chapter book will appeal to Junie B. Jones fans.

• *I Found a Dead Bird: The Kids' Guide to the Cycle of Life & Death*, by Jan Thornhill, Maple Tree, 2006, \$9.95. This nonfiction treatment of heavy topics is intelligent, age-appropriate and packed with info about nature.

• *Secrets, Lies, Gizmos and Spies: A History of Spies and Espionage*, by Janet Wyman Coleman, Abrams, 2006, \$24.95. This informative look at espionage includes photographs, lingo and interviews.

• *What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety*, by Dawn Huebner, illustrated by Bonnie Matthews, Magination Press/American Psychological Association, 2005, \$14.95. A self-help book that bypasses jargon to become a terrific resource for kids.

• *The Year of the Dog*, by Grace Lin; Little, Brown; 2006; \$14.99. For Ramona Quimby lovers, this sparkling chapter book recounts the adventures of a Taiwanese-American girl.

• *Edwina the Dinosaur Who Didn't Know She Was Extinct*, by Mo Willems, Hyperion, 2006, \$16.99. Everyone loves Edwina except for Reginald Von Hoobie-Doobie, who is ready to prove that dinosaurs are extinct.

• *Happy Birthday to Whooo?* by Doris Fisher, illustrated by Lisa Downey, Sylvan Dell, 2006, \$15.95. Kids get a kick out of this guessing game about the births of various baby animals.

• *Let's Play in the Forest While the Wolf Is Not Around!* by Claudia Rueda, Scholastic, 2006, \$16.99. Animals play while a wolf dresses – one garment at a time – and becomes hungrier in the process.

• *My First Art Book & Easel*, from Alex Toys, LB Kids, 2006, \$14.99. Irresistible art assignments; includes paints and assorted media.

• *The Twelve Days of Winter*, by Deborah Lee Rose, illustrated by Carey Armstrong-Ellis, Abrams, 2006, \$14.95. It's a blizzard of activity when the class counts down to winter in this cumulative pattern book.



For the Whole Family

• *The Adventures of Odysseus*, by Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden, illustrated by Christina Balit, Barefoot, 2006, \$19.99. Homer's epic tale contains lush illustrations, accessible prose and thrilling adventures.

• *The Barefoot Book of Classic Poems*, illustrated by Jackie Morris, Barefoot, 2006, \$19.99. Another must-have, this collection of 70 great poems (from Lear and Carroll to Shakespeare and Poe) features illustrations that are worth dwelling on.

• *Blue 2: A Pop-up Book for Children of All Ages*, by David A. Carter, Little Simon, 2006, \$19.95. This alphabet book intrigues readers journeying for true blue clues.

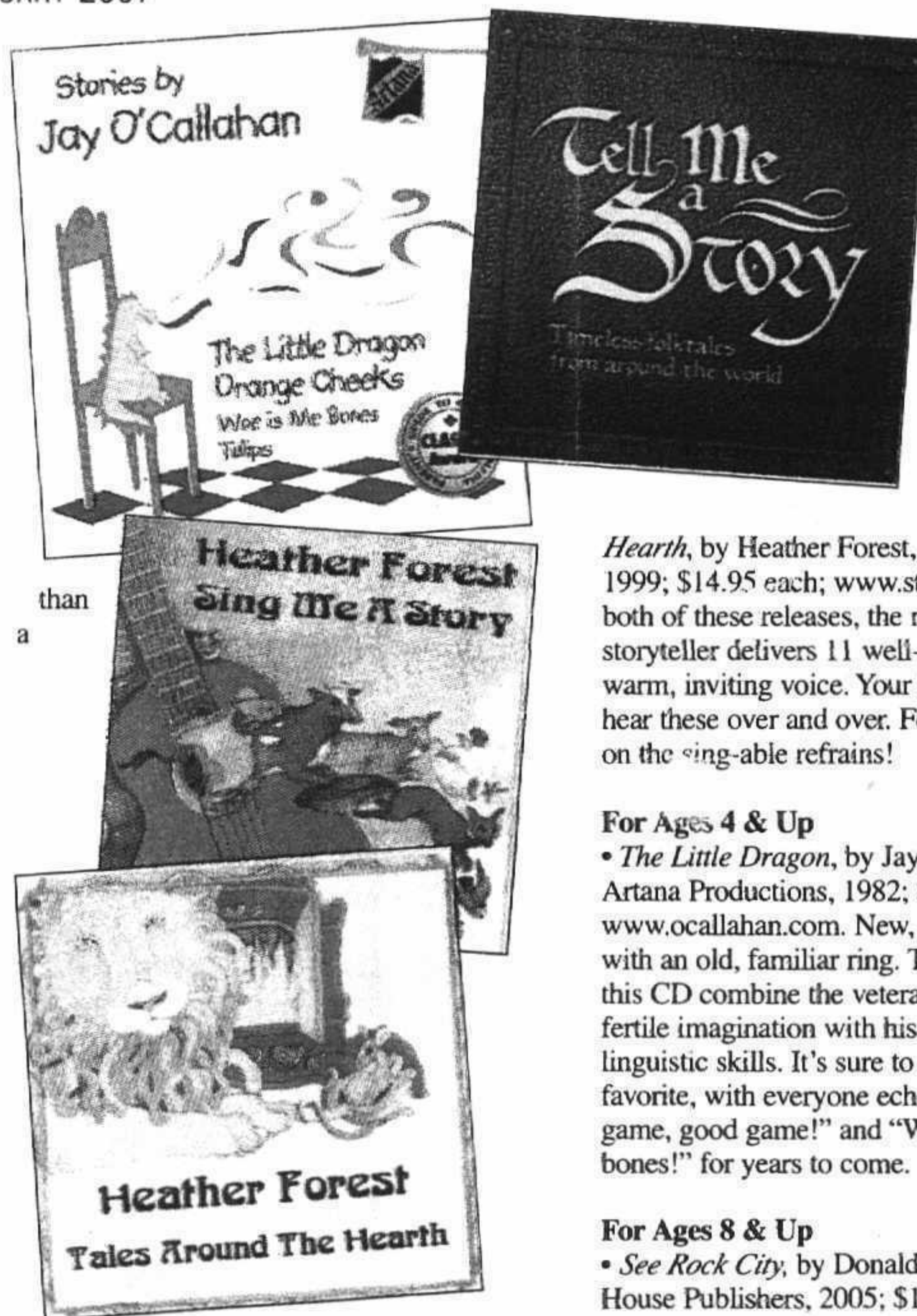
• *Cranium FunFolio: Family Edition*, from LB Kids, 2006, \$14.99. A book and materials for making up stories, preserving family history and more to jump-start conversation.

• *John, Paul, George & Ben*, by Lane Smith, Hyperion, 2006, \$16.99. The Beatles meet the signers of the Declaration of Independence in this fun-and-facts book.

Spoken-Word & Storytelling

By Marilyn McPhie

The next time you're in the car, take note: If you'd like to rise above the din of traffic, the drone of talk radio and the barrage of backseat bickering, what could be better



story? Here are the Gold Award-

winners to get you started.

For Infants & Toddlers

• *Sing Me A Story and Tales Around the*

Hearth, by Heather Forest, Story Arts, both 1999; \$14.95 each; www.storyarts.org. On both of these releases, the minstrel-storyteller delivers 11 well-loved stories in a warm, inviting voice. Your kids will ask to hear these over and over. Feel free to join in on the sing-able refrains!

For Ages 4 & Up

• *The Little Dragon*, by Jay O'Callahan, Artana Productions, 1982; \$15; www.ocallahan.com. New, original tales with an old, familiar ring. The four tales on this CD combine the veteran storyteller's fertile imagination with his acrobatic linguistic skills. It's sure to be a family favorite, with everyone echoing "Good game, good game!" and "Woe is me bones!" for years to come.

For Ages 8 & Up

• *See Rock City*, by Donald Davis, August House Publishers, 2005; \$14.95;

www.augusthouse.com. Davis is laugh-out-loud funny as he relates experiences we've all shared. Plus, you can learn a new family road game – cow poker.

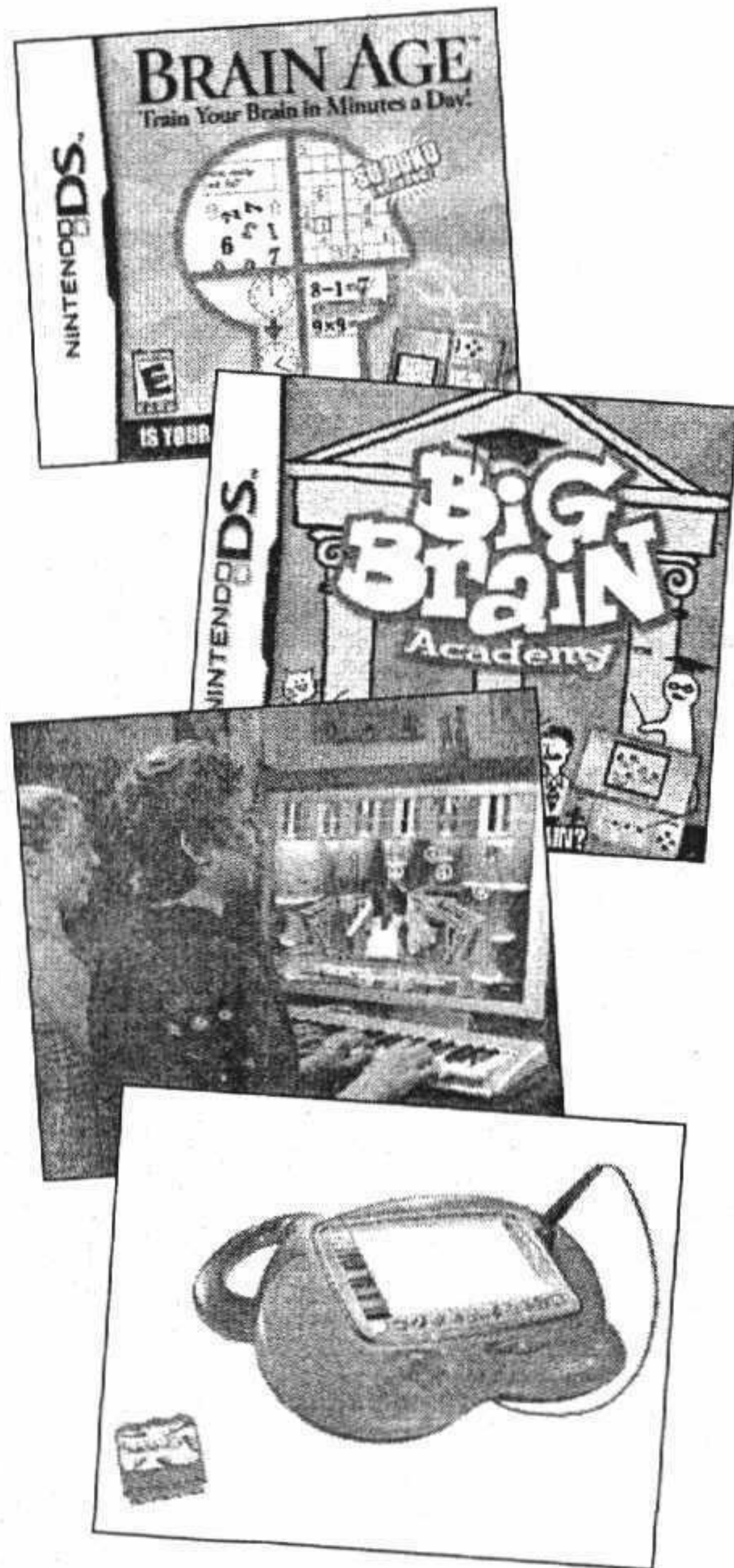
• *Tell Me a Story*, written by Amy Friedman, read by various artists, D & F Productions, 2006; \$18.95; www.mythsandtales.com. Travel the world while doing errands, carpooling or relaxing at home. Eight great folktales hail from different cultures, each with a cast of actors and music suited to the tale. A favorite of kids and parents.

• *Thomas Jefferson's America*, by Jim Weiss, Greathall Productions, 2006; \$14.95; www.greathall.com. This portrait of one of America's founding fathers is both interesting and educational. A brief introduction on the nature of heroes can lead to some lively family discussions, too.

Software & Video Games

By Alex Chisholm

The past few years have seen an explosion of new software titles and electronic games that move beyond what's possible with the keyboard and joystick. These innovations invite kids of all ages to literally jump in to experiences with easy-to-use dance pads, skateboards, drawing slates and other devices that connect directly to the computer and TV. These wonderful new ways of interacting with technology enable designers to create products that



go way beyond old-school “drill and thrill” activities. These NAPPA Gold Award-winners represent some of the best.

For Preschoolers & Elementary Students

- *Piano Wizard*, Allegro Multimedia, 2005; \$199.95; Windows 98 and later; www.allegro-rainbow.com; for ages 5 and up. Pricy, yes, but a worthwhile investment. This USB plug-in works with your PC and introduces kids to the keyboard, sheet music and many popular piano classics. Highly versatile, it provides step-by-step instruction – often through simple games and visuals – to help kids learn where to place their fingers, how to count measures, read music and progress through more advanced musical exercises. A proficiency meter helps kids track their progress.

- *V-Smile Art Studio*, VTech, 2006; \$29.99 for Art Studio, \$59.99 for VSmile TV Learning System; www.vtech.com/toys; for ages 5 to 7. Putting a blank paper and crayons in front of a child is one of the simplest things we can do to unlock imagination and empower creativity. As an add-on to VTech’s popular VSmile TV Learning System, Art Studio provides reams of virtual paper and a bucket of interactive tools that allow children to create the next generation of “refrigerator art.” With a tethered stylus and smooth design surface, young artists learn how to match colors, draw different shapes and objects, animate

illustrations and play games.

For Ages 9 & Up

- *Big Brain Academy* and *Brain Age* for Nintendo DS Lite, Nintendo, 2006; \$19.99 each (\$129.99 for Nintendo DS Lite); www.nintendo.com. Nintendo has a reputation for making the most basic activities and game play fun and engaging. Big Brain Academy and Brain Age keep you wanting more and always deliver. Leveraging the dual-screen (hence the “DS”) mode and touchscreen features of its powerful new handheld gaming system, Nintendo has released a series of “brain-teaser” games to help kids keep their minds sharp. Although it may appear like a simple series of activities – players have to perform basic math, identify moving figures, memorize lists of words – Nintendo’s approach makes it exciting by allowing players to compete against themselves with a running log of daily performance. The wireless feature enables competition among friends and family. Included, of course, is Sudoku. Need we say more?

- *Xipster FullStop*, XOW, 2003; \$39.95; Mac/Windows 2000 and up; www.xipster.com. This is the perfect tool for today’s media-savvy kids who want to grow up and make movies or produce games. Xipster puts a powerful set of PC-based video and digital capture tools in their hands. The interface is easy to learn and use, allowing them to quickly start creating their own stories and producing their own animations.

The NAPPA Judges

NAPPA judges are all experts in evaluating and writing about children’s products. They have years of experience working with children. They know what kids like, and they recognize the qualities that make a good product stand out from the crowd.

- **Books** – Helen Foster James, Ed.D., is an author and a professor of children’s literature at San Diego State University and National University. Kathleen Krull has reviewed children’s literature for parenting magazines across the country for nearly a decade. She is the author of the “Lives of...” series and other books for young readers. Find out more at www.HelenFosterJames.com and www.KathleenKrull.com.

- **Software & Video Games** – Alex Chisholm has worked extensively in games research and creative development as co-director of the Education Arcade at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is vice president and director of content experience at IPG Media’s Consumer Experience Practice, and has also worked with various TV, film and software companies. Check out www.educationarcade.org.

- **Spoken-Word & Storytelling** – Marilyn McPhie has been a professional storyteller for nearly two decades. A member of the National Storytelling Network, she has presented at many storytelling conferences and writes a column for a storytelling newsletter. Check out www.MarilynMcPhie.com.