Moptown's moppets teach kids logical reasoning

Hy John Lombardi

Can Gribbits and Bibbits teach children logic? Apple Computer's Special Delivery Software provides a nifty little game called Moptown that tests a child's skill against the moppets of Moptown.

The moppets come in various shapes, colors and types. You can have 16 different moppets that combine red or blue, fat or thin, tall or short, Gribbit or Bibbit (Gribbits have tails).

The trick to this game is to develop rules for the combination of these

to moppets displayed on the screen. If you build a correct twin, you get a pleasant set of beeps and flashes as a reward; if you goof, you are chided and you can try again.

Other games in Moptown let you figure out what is different about a set of moppets or who comes next in a series of different moppets. As the games become more complex, the reasoning required to figure out which combination of characteristics is called for also grows more complex. The last game, Moptown Hotel, requires a several-dimension combination of characteristics.

The sequence of games, with color graphics by a gifted 11-year-old, provides an excellent experience for elementary-school children. In a doroughly unscientific sample, I tested this game on a mildly computer-literate sixth-grader who found most of the games fun, exciting, inleiguing and "neat."

My 13-year-old, with the disdain appropriate to this age group, found the programs too easy, although he had to admit that they were well presented and designed.

Who can tell how effective games like this are in teaching something as complex as logic and reasoning? Still, if you use the games with other classroom activities that develop similar skills, they could provide a pleasant reinforcement.

EASE OF USE: Any elementary school child who can turn on the computer and play a game can use this program. Its prompts are usually clear See Moptown, page 59

InfoWorld Software Report Card				
Moptown	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Performance			Ø	
Documentation				
Pase of Esc				\mathbf{Z}
Error Bandling				Z

System Requirements

- Apple II or 11 Plus
- DOS 3.3
- 48K RAM and Applesoft in ROM or 48K RAM and 16K RAM Card
- · One disk drive
- Color video monitor or color TV

Price: \$50

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characteristics for a variety of purposes. Each game teaches a different aspect of logical reasoning.

FEATURES: The package consists of a master disk, a backup disk, a complete and useful manual and the programs. The programs work on an Apple that has at least 48K, one disk and Applesoft. Although you can play some of the games with a green screen or black-and-white monitor, the package really requires a color monitor or

PERFORMANCE: The Moptown programs work well. Although the manual is good and complete, most children and their parents or teachers won't need the manual because the on-screen instructions give the necessary information. Moreover, these instructions are almost always available during the game at the touch of a key.

The graphic presentation of the various scenes and figures shows imagination and skill. Each game in the progression of activities that constitute Moptown illustrates some aspect of logical reasoning. The games use the 16 different combinations of characteristics that pertain to the inhabitants of this make-believe town.

For example, the game Make My Twin allows the player to build twins Expand your possibilities with Concurrent CP/M."

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work with files larger than that, the menu allows you to unlink and relink these blocks of text.

EASE OF USE: You have to know BA-SIC. Por example, to change the default parameters for printing, you must list the program and alter lines of code.

The program comes configured to drive an Epson printer using a driver called PRINTER. To reconfigure it, you have to be familiar with BASIC, since, once again, you must list the program and after parts of the code.

The limitations imposed by BASIC are evident elsewhere. After every 250 lines, you must type Control-Q to enter into file memory what you've just created. Printouts to the screen and

Broost scarcines can be slow.

ERROR HANDLING: Most of my time learning the program was spent recovering from errors and trying to get back into the damed program. I was not always successful.

If you simply start the program, load the file called SAMPLE and press carriage return to print it on the screen, you get the first three lines of the file and then ILLEGAL QUANTITY ERROR in 850!

There are innumerable ways to get dumped out. After quitting, you get the prompt Overwrite of FILE _____ in a this point, you type a letter instead of the expected number, you get the message FILE NOT FOUND ERROR IN 2530 and

BASIC prompt.

Sometimes, while editing a line, if you insert more than 253 characters, you will be thrown out again—this time with a stack-overflow message. In fact, if you have specified a hard-disk drive as the device, you can't save your file at all, because the program doesn't recognize the device!

You'll get thrown out if you try to:

Do a global copy or delete specifying lines that are out of range. Message: ILLEGAL QUANTITY ERROR IN 3000.

 Mistype a filename during load.
 Message: PATH NOT FOUND ERROR IN 610.

• Type a filename after you've used the default drive as part of a file pathname. Message: FILES BUSY ER- **BOR IN 3840.**

◆ Try to enter a pathname for a file. You must enter the drive number, then carriage return, then the filename. If you enter a pathname, then press Return twice, you will get the first line from your file followed by another prompt for a filename. At this point, if you enter the filename again, you get PATH NOT FOUND ERROR IN 5th.

One whole page of the documentation is devoted to procedures to get back into the program. Typing GOTO 4320 saves the text you have in memory: typing GOTO 1000 allows you to reenter the editor.

The program does not load any textfile except those marked as Word . Weaver files. In fact, cataloging a disk gives a list of only files Word Weaver . put on disk

The program is just too easy to crash.

DOCUMENTATION: The 5 x 7-inch vinyl-covered ring binder has only 36 pages with no tutorial, although there is a file called SAMPLE provided. There are four appendices explaining procedures such as how to recover after an error has thrown you out of the pro-

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continued from page 57 and its instructions are good.

The most useful environment for this Moptown package is the elementary school, where successive generations of children can play it once or twice in the course of units on logic. It does less well as a home educational program because once the child understands the process of matching characteristics or deducing rules, boredom sets in rapidly.

Unfortunately, the game is copy protected and so its use in a school that has more than two Apples becomes clumsy. It is also not possible to get at the code, so creative teachers can't modify these programs to change the rules or otherwise enhance the effectiveness of Moptown for some specific educational objective.

ERROR HANDLING: Moptown's input routines are almost foolproof. Errors don't occur because you are not allowed to make any. If you enter things incorrectly, the program won't take them. Furthermore, you can always consult the instructions to find out why things are not working the way they should.

DOCUMENTATION: This package is well documented. The clear, useful instructions include a full discussion of the purposes and goals of the designer. The program is not complex, so the instructions tell all that anyone needs to know to make the program work. They don't, however, help anyone who might want to write a similar program.

SUPPORT: This is a program from Apple's Special Delivery Software. Support consists of including a backup disk with the main disk. No replacement policy is articulated in the manual or anywhere else on the packaging. SUMMARY: Moptown is fun. educational, useful and interesting. It is a well executed, tightly focused program that could prove useful in many elementary schools.

