

PRODUCT reviews

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GeeGuides geeArt16

By Savilla Banister

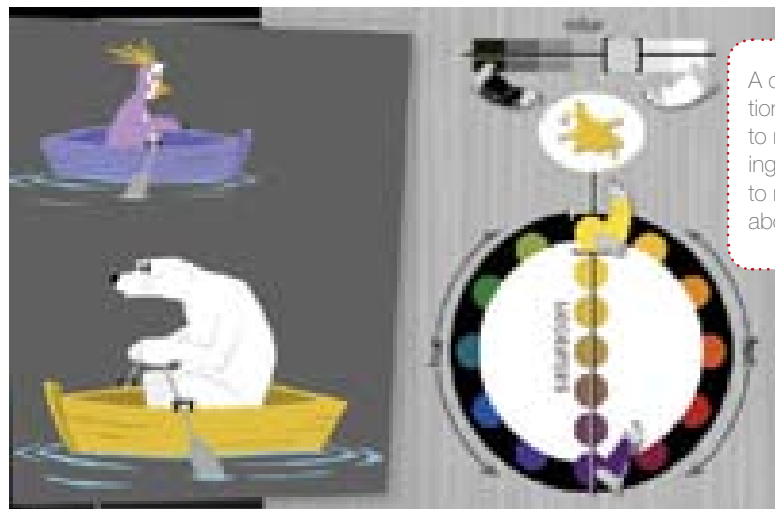
GeeGuides provides online, interactive, well-designed lessons in art theory, art history, and art creation. The Web site requires a login for students and for teachers. It stores individual student progress through the 16 lesson modules, including student portfolios of their digital art creations. GeeGuides purchase includes the license for Corel Painter Essentials Paint Software, which students may use to create various art products.

GeeGuides is easy to navigate, once one logs in as either a teacher or a student. Besides the main menu that allows access to the 16 modules, a Glossary, a Gallery of Art, and a My Portfolio section can be accessed on the left-side tab menu. Each of the 16 modules offers an overview of the topic covered (The Language of Art, Color, Line, Portraits, etc.), activities, movies and “challenges,” interactive quizzes that ask students to apply the information covered in the module.

These challenges allow students to manipulate art materials in a digital environment, in a way that might be too expensive and messy, otherwise. For example, in the module on color and value, students can sample various hues and add black or white paint to change the value of the colors, without actually using real paint. This type of experimentation can assist a student in being more thoughtful and deliberate about the colors mixed and applied on an actual canvas.



The well-designed interface is appropriate for most K–5 students. Here, the GeeGuides Color Movie is activated in the module, providing students an introduction to the topic.



A challenge question invites students to mix colors, adding black or white to make decisions about color value.

GeeGuides materials are well designed and provide a nice balance of animated, interactive, audio, and video elements to maintain student attention. Art teachers and elementary classroom teachers could use GeeGuides to supplement their fine arts curriculum. If a teacher uses a computer projection system, the GeeGuides material could be shared as a full-classroom experience. However, the power of GeeGuides is its ability

to provide individualized interaction and maintain records and art portfolios for the users.

Teachers are provided with a variety of hands-on art activities, as well as digital art experiences. These lesson plans and art activity descriptions may be downloaded as PDF files to print or to save.

As a Web-based resource, GeeGuides is dependent on a fast Internet connection. If several teachers are using this

program or other streaming products (such as United Streaming), a school might find that their bandwidth won't support such use.

Although the GeeGuides site doesn't specifically say that the program is targeted toward K–5 students, I made that assumption based on the cartoon character guides, the Corel tutorial structure, and the pace of the 16 modules. Younger students

might require assistance from an adult while navigating the program. Older students should be able to work independently.

To get a better feel for the program, access a full lesson at <http://www.geeguides.com/demo/>. I would encourage an exploration of the items provided before purchasing. If you are looking for a resource that will stimulate student interest and competence in

art fundamentals, GeeGuides may be for you. Cost is \$69.95 for a family or homeschool license (\$34.95 for additional students) or \$995 for a school site license (includes unlimited student logins for 12 months).

GeeGuides, LLC

GeeGuides geeArt16; \$69.95
<http://www.geeguides.com>
 1.888.375.0560, FAX 1.970.375.0566

Travels with Music

By Savilla Banister

Travels with Music is an interactive environment inviting the user to explore the world via music. The interface opens with a world map noting 10 regions (soon to be 15) available for “travel.” Once a region is selected, a variety of media are presented, including video and audio clips, images of the artists and their instruments, and explanatory text. A glossary and multiple games are also included that support the users in developing aural skills in identifying the musical instruments highlighted. An excellent preview of the program is provided online at <http://www.travelswithmusic.org/preview/TWM.php>.

The content provided is of high quality and further engagement with the artists, their music, and their countries is encouraged with e-mail addresses provided. Of course, if hundreds of students began e-mailing these artists every day, they might not be able to respond quickly, but the opportunities for dialogue could meet the needs of teachers targeting multicultural awareness through asynchronous communication.

As noted above, the application can be purchased on DVD, in which case a computer with a DVD drive is required, or via Internet subscription. Using a high-speed connection, I had

no trouble navigating the program and quickly accessing the video and audio content. This would not be the case if high speed and high bandwidth were unavailable. Flash Player and Quicktime Player are also both needed for the application to run. These are free downloads for any operating system.

The Web site notes that educational discounts are available, but apparently these need to be negotiated, as an exact discount price was not noted. Although the program could be a welcome addition to K–12 music classrooms, or any classroom where diversity and multicultural understanding is an emphasis, teachers should check with their school tech support staff before purchasing. If Internet subscriptions are purchased, school network

systems must be robust enough to handle the streaming media and open enough not to block the elements within the site with local firewalls. If DVDs are purchased, teachers should be sure they have DVD drives on all workstations that would handle the program.

PassportM, Inc.

Travels with Music; \$99 (DVD), \$80 (online)
<http://www.travelswithmusic.org/twmlive/>
 1.510.540.8136



High-quality content on the Travels with Music DVD helps students discover the arts and music of various world cultures and regions.



Savilla Banister is an associate professor of classroom technology at Bowling Green State University. Banister taught visual arts and music in elementary schools prior to her tenure at BGSU. She continues to work with K–12 teachers as they integrate multimedia technologies into their classroom. She serves as L&L's curriculum specialist in the visual and performing arts.

NewSoft WMS 100 Image

By J.V. Bolkan

When I heard of NewSoft's WMS 100 Image wireless projector adapter, I immediately thought of all the new ways I could put my laptop and (non-wireless) projector to work. Turns out hardly any of them are practical with this device. There are real and valuable uses for the WMS 100—they just probably aren't the ones you're imagining for your classroom.

Undoubtedly, the disconnect comes from the connection technology and terminology itself. When I imagine a device using wireless networking technology, I think of a network device, such as a printer, another laptop, router, desktops, and so on. The WMS 100 does not turn your non-networked projector into a standard network device. Instead, it enables you to use your existing wireless connection (802.11 a/b/g) to send the display signal (rather than data) to the projector. This isn't just geek semantics—when you are connected to the WMS 100, you cannot use your computer's wireless connection for anything else. No copying files from a file server. No Internet. No network printing.

It isn't all bleak in the networking arena—swapping control between multiple computers was quite easy. I simply installed the Presto! WMS 2.5 software on both a desktop and my laptop, then chose a source. NewSoft includes three software license keys with the WMS 100 (additional licenses cost \$29.95 for a single, and \$135.95 for 5). Versions for Mac and Win are available, I looked at the Windows version using Win XP.



The WMS 100 Image is relatively easy to set up, but even though I could get my standard HP projector (top) to work with it, I'm not sure wireless projection technology is classroom ready.

I did have to reconfigure my monitor settings. The adapter will only display desktop images in 800 × 600 or 1024 × 768 resolutions. Between my laptop's LCD display being forced into a non-standard mode and the projector also running in a non-native mode, slight blurring was the result both on the projector screen and my monitor. Although my resized 1024 × 768 desktop quickly reproduced on the projector, I immediately noticed a significant display lag of nearly a second, even when simply moving the cursor across the screen. Swapping to the lower resolution helped, but didn't cure the sluggishness. Although my test wireless network reliably connects at "g" speeds (54 Mbps), I was never able to configure the WMS 100 beyond the "b" standard speed of 11 Mbps maximum.

Despite the obvious lag, I attempted to open and run a video clip. Even at virtual postage-stamp size, the video simply didn't have enough bandwidth to be even close to watchable. In fact, almost any animation or movement of any sort comes close to maximizing the bandwidth at 1024 × 768.

Relatively static presentations, slide-shows, and text are all appropriate for use over the WMS 100. If you can't upgrade your existing non-networked projector and must be able to switch between multiple computers, the WMS 100 is an option. However, for \$279.95, it may not be your best option for the classroom.

NewSoft Technology Corporation
WMS 100 Image; \$279.95
1.408.503.1200
<http://www.newsoftinc.com>



J.V. Bolkan is associate publisher/senior editor for L&L. He has been reviewing and writing about multimedia and technology for more than 20 years.

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