

Weekly Wonder Tech/Toy: Endless Alphabet

When Collin's teacher told me he was having trouble with his sight words, I sought out some solutions to help kick start his reading. I decided to search for apps for my iPad since I'd installed a handful of other learning games. (Plus, it's a great device for keeping him occupied in restaurants or during long waits.) In my search, I discovered Endless Alphabet by Originator Kids, and decided to give it a try, especially since it had over 250 five-star reviews.

The program features a colorful, scrolling menu of words the user may choose to spell. These aren't your typical starter words, like "cat" or "dog." Children using Endless Alphabet will learn words like "famished" or "gargantuan." When the word is selected, it is presented in fun letters and stormed by an animated army of little monsters.



Next, the outline of the word is presented, surrounded by the missing letters, dressed up like little monsters, who are dragged into the letter spaces. As they're dragged, the monster letters repeatedly vocalize the sound letters make. I admit, I found it annoying at first, but when I considered the phonetic value of the noise, I adjusted my attitude, sat back, and watched Collin learn.

After the word is spelled, cheering ensues, followed by a short cartoon illustrating the word. Lastly, a woman's voice gives a simple definition. "When you forgive someone, you stop feeling angry at them." What a perfect word to teach to children. My one criticism is that the words can be spelled in any order. I'd rather see the letters rejected if they're meant to be used later in the word. Otherwise, I'm doubtful that Endless Alphabet is an effective spelling tool.

Still, I'm pleased with the progress Collin is making with Endless Alphabet, even if the words are "gargantuan" compared to the sight words offered by Originator Kids' much simpler app, Endless Reader, of which Collin is also a fan. He laughs over and over again at the cartoons and has begun incorporating some bigger words into his vocabulary. His greatest triumph was when he said, "Mom, let's d-e-c-o-r-a-t-e for St. Patrick's Day." With a request like that, the answer was "yes."

Endless Alphabet is available at the Apple App Store for \$6.99. (Yes, it's expensive, but considering the cost of other phonics texts and programs, it's a fair deal).