Moptown: educational game from Advanced Learning Technology

Little moppets dance on an Apple screen, waiting to be put in their proper places—that is, grouped by such characteristics as color, size and shape. Children play games with the moppets (or Gribbits and Bibbits, as they are more fantastically known) and are taught the precepts of logical thought during game play.

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; you choose their characteristics—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 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 TV.

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

REPORT CARD

Moptown

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Performance	☐	☐	☑	☐
Documentation	☐	☐	☑	☐
Ease of Use	☐	☐	☑	☐
Error Handling	☐	☐	☐	☑

System Requirements
- *Apple II or II 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: $39.95

Advanced Learning Technology, Inc.
545 Middlefield Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025
(415) 328-5410

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 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

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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 thoroughly unscientific sample, I tested Moptown on a mildly computer literate sixth-grader who found most of the games fun, exciting, intriguing 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 for lessons learned.

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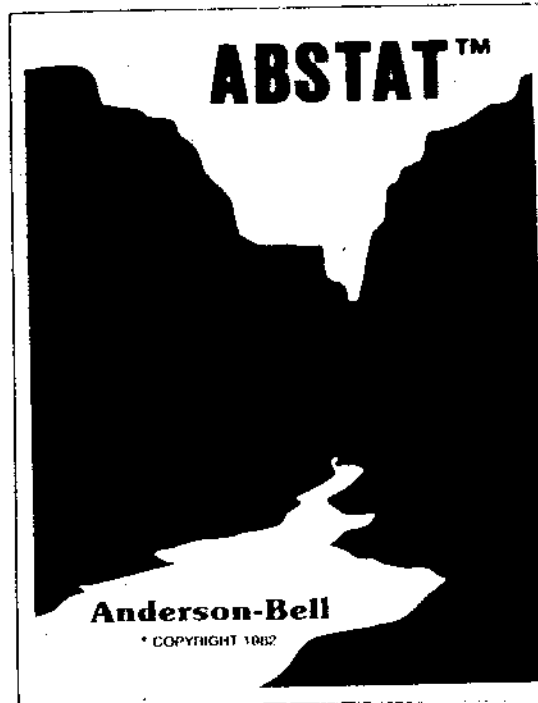
Documentation: This package is well documented. The clear, useful instructions include a full discussion of the purposes and goals of the designer. The program is not complex, so the instructions tell all that anyone needs to know to make the program work. They don't, however, help anyone who might want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

Support: This is a program from Apple's Special Delivery Software. Support consists of the inclusion of 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.
— *John Lombardi*