

The Top Twelve

More than 600Mb of information in one place - that in itself should be enough to worry you! Whatever the scope of your lesson or project, how can you ever be sure that everything on a CD-ROM is suitable, well-presented and accessible? You can't.

Unfortunately there is an unreasonably high proportion of commercial CD-ROMs available which contain what is known as shovelware - material that has just been shovelled on to the disc to take up the space. Much of it is inferior quality, or irrelevant to the disc's purpose. Even when all the resources on the disc have been carefully chosen and sifted for quality, organizing them is still an art in itself.

Children of any age will rarely have the understanding (let alone the patience) to shin up and down directory trees (often inappropriately named - after letters of the alphabet for example) to find resources they don't know are there in the first place.

There are few people who have even begun to come up with satisfactory answers about educational CD-ROM use: about the issues of copyright (extracting graphics from a disc to use in DTP work is common); about properly indexing and documenting such huge amounts of data; about tracing and retracing your path through volumes of often quite intriguing and eminently browsable pages or screens; about checking the reading age of every instruction or caption so that the most can be got from, say, collections of photos relating to nature, or historical events.

Two publications that do help, and that should be consulted especially by primary schools (over 2,000 of which will have just received their CD-ROM drives under the DfE scheme), are those produced by NCET and by Middlesex University's Science and Technology Education Centre.

The former publishes Evaluation and Development of CD-ROM in Schools, the latter The Application of CD-ROM in Primary Schools. Consult them both for ideas and to construct your own net through which the dross passes and the nuggets get captured. Most of the following list at least twinkle if you cast enough light on them, and some are positively gems.

Kingfisher Micropedia (ESM, £90) is one of the better encyclopedias available. It is based on its paper equivalent and is intended for children. The material is well-arranged, suitable for all ages from key stage 1 up, and is attractive to look at, although there are no actual photos. Above all, the interface and design would be most useful in teaching information-handling skills.

Langdale (Creative Curriculum Software, £99) covers the geography and history of the Langdale area of the Lake District. It is easy to use (the paths through the material are well-planned), comprehensive and well-supported with good additional curriculum material. All the material can be copied except the graphics supplied in map form by the

Mark Sealey presents a round-up of some of the better new CD-ROM titles available for education

Ordnance Survey. It is perhaps of more use at key stages 3 and 4 as an adjunct to the study of a small area in its own right. Though a little expensive by today's standards, the disc can be recommended as fit for its purpose.

Picturebase (AVP, £199) is one of the most exciting projects to appear this year. Again, an excellent resource where the aim is to enable pupils to develop their skills of managing a large resource (mostly high-quality graphics) and select intelligently from what is available. The modules in the series (so far Earth and Atmosphere, Landscapes, Expansion, Trade and Industry and Victorian Britain have appeared) have been designed to allow users to make similar use of the materials electronically as they would sitting at a library desk. Exciting.

Treasure Chest (SEMERC, £69) is just that - but so well done that it would serve as a perfect example of how to resource almost all areas of the curriculum, with appropriate graphics suitable for children of all

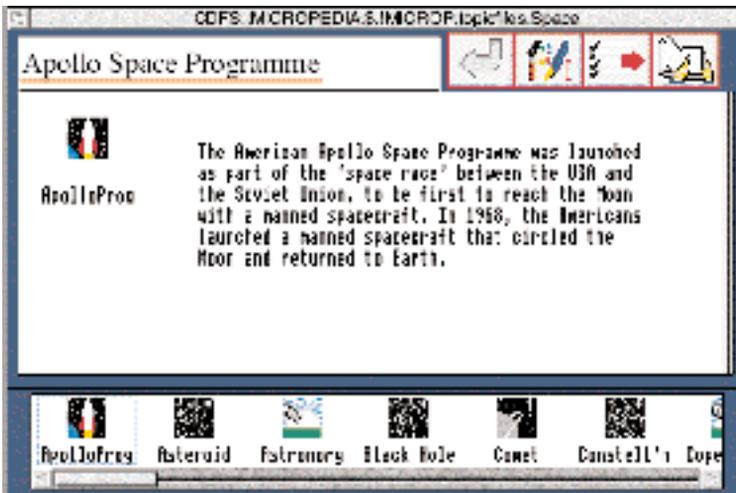
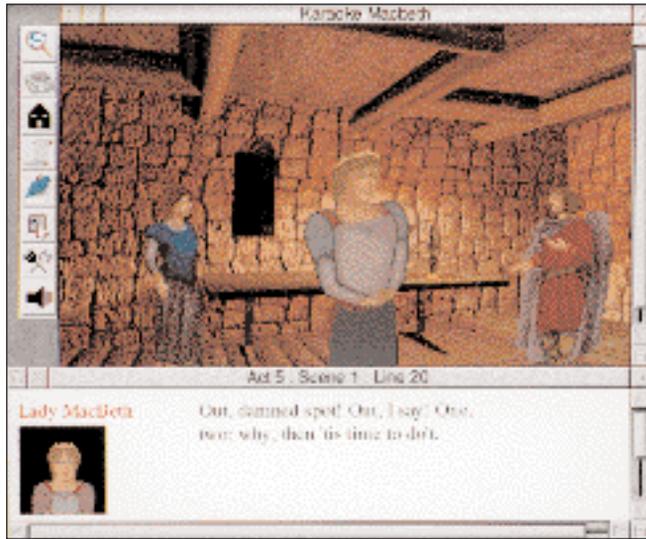
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ages and those with certain special needs. The text has sound and there is a way of marking what you visit. Attractively priced, it should be in every school. Understanding Energy (Anglia TV, £40) is another in Anglia's seemingly unstoppable series of educational CD-ROM titles. Excellently presented, though more suitable for kids at key stages 3 and 4, it covers the topic well and is full of clearly organized and laid-out material that is visually appealing, too.

Watch out, too, for Anglia's Garden Wildlife (also a very reasonable £40); just released, it is intended to support pupils in key stage 2 who are looking at this area of both science and geography. It concentrates on the

material, though this one was heavily criticized on its appearance. However, there is

come about and learn more about the people who make them. An interesting idea.



Kingfisher Micropedia

sort of detailed graphics (close-up photography, in particular) with which many children will be familiar through observational drawing.

Chemistry Set (New Media, £99) is having a chequered history. Anything to help with science at secondary level is to be welcomed, as there is such a dearth of

evidence that the comments made by reviewers have been listened to, and Chemistry Set 2, which is designed to be an interactive library and encyclopedia of most things chemical, will be worth a look.

Inventors and Inventions (British Library, price not yet fixed) is a set of interactive material to help users to understand how inventions

Another novel idea - and one that will only really work at key stage 4 - is Karaoke Macbeth (Animated Pixels, available from Cumana for £49.95). Here pupils can join in the Shakespeare play in a variety of ways: reading all the parts, reading some, duplicating all or some. If used intelligently, anyone working with Macbeth should find this a useful aid: it is well-designed, easy to use and attractively presented.

The latest Attica release for Acom is the ITN European Atlas (£199). This is just the sort of thing that should be finding its way on to this medium. In addition to the maps, there are statistics and economic, political and environmental information. Comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date, it is an ideal resource for students at key stages 3 and 4 looking at any aspect of Europe.

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PC Titles

There are undoubtedly many more good CD-ROMs available at present for PC compatibles than for Acom. If you have the right hardware and the right card, this should mean you can use them. If not, a new utility from DeskTop Laminations called MMviewer (£47.50 to education) claims to allow PC CD-ROMs to work properly under the PC Emulator. This is still in development but is an interesting one to watch.

Postscript

In the last year Chris Drage, Mark Sealey and other contributors to RISC User have also reviewed: the first six

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Attica
Unit 2,
King's Meadow Ferry
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tel 01865 791346
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AVP School Hill Centre
Chepstow Gwent
Newport NP6 5PH
tel 01291 625439
fax 01291-629671

British Library CD-ROM
distributed by:
Turpin
Black Horse Road
Letchworth
Hertfordshire SG6 1HN
tel 01462 672555

fax 01462 480947

Creative Curriculum
Software
5 Clover Hill Road
Saville Park
Halifax HX1 2YG
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Cumana
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Guildford GU3 3BH
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