This video is one in the series of videos designed to assist teachers to use technology in their classrooms. It runs for 22 minutes duration and can be used for staff inservices. The video has been developed by two Victorian teachers, June Stratford and Jane Morrison. Following the theme that teachers need to work "smarter not harder" the video shows 5 year old, 8 year old and 11 year old children producing multimedia projects using KidsPix Studio and HyperStudio in their classroom. The purpose of the video is to show how within a school you can optimise your investment in computer equipment; challenge staff with exciting, new teaching strategies, encourage team building and foster co-operative professional development. As Stratford and Morrison state in the handbook accompanying the video "using technology gives a whole new perspective to teaching. It promotes thinking, problem solving and co-operative learning. You will see how to use multimedia with students to enhance and facilitate learning in a wide range of subject areas. Only minimum equipment and technological skills are required to accomplish significant learning outcomes. The 5 year old's created a class book using KidsPix Studio on the topic of butterflies in an integrated program covering the areas of English, Arts, Maths, Science and Technology. The 8 year old's created group projects of six slides each using KidsPix Studio on the topic of Australian flora and fauna. This was an integrated program covering the areas of SOSE, English and Technology. The group of 11 year old's were involved in an integrated topic on the history of communications using the multimedia program HyperStudio. This unit of work covered the areas of SOSE integrated with English and Technology and used other technologies such as the digital camera, video camera and the Internet with groups of students producing projects. This is an excellent video to show staff and parents what can be done when a class is set up correctly for technology and the teacher and children have a purpose to use the computer in an integrated theme of work.


You will also see some video of what 'Kids Can Do' with computer technology when it has been introduced across the curriculum in meaningful ways. These are in the form of three virtual classrooms showing exemplars of technology situations that can be viewed through Quicktime VR technology. Anderson's Creek Primary School has computers in the class and the students are involved in web-site projects; Blackburn Lake Primary School has just moved from a one computer classroom to a two computer classroom and models a unit of work being completed on oceans; and Elwood Primary School shows a lab of computers in which the computing teacher concentrates on computer skills reinforced through multimedia authoring.

This CD-ROM is great value and a useful resource for educators wanting to update their skills and knowledge in the area of K-6 computing.
The "Inside Stories" series from Mimosa Technology aims to develop reading skills in Primary and Pre-Primary school children. Language games and activities are integrated into a series of CD-ROMs, using selected familiar stories as themes. Co-author David Hornsby is best known for his "Write On - A Conference Approach to Writing", and "Read On - A Conference Approach to Reading". Co-author Brenda Parkes has worked closely with the Rigby Publishing Company, producing educational children's books.

"Inside Stories" would be most suitable for children at the 'Experimental', 'Early', and 'Transitional' reading phases ("First Steps", 1994). Some of the activities would also be suitable for children at the (less advanced) 'Role Playing' and (more advanced) 'Independent' reading phases.

The four stories are "The Three Little Pigs", "The Three Billy Goats Gruff", "Goldilocks and the Three Bears", and "The Gingerbread Man". Although the product is of American origin (evidenced by the accent of the audio components), the wording of the tales is fairly close to 'traditional' language. Such aspects of cultural neutrality maximise opportunities for participation as children are familiar with the language and story.

Each fairy tale is well presented in its own robust, ring-bound, plastic file. Within each file is a CD-ROM, map of the CD-ROM's navigational structure, skills overview sheet, teacher's guide, and blackline masters. The CD-ROM is easy to load, containing software for both Macintosh and Windows-based (95, 3.1, and 3.11) computers. Hard-copy instructions are also provided at the back of the file, should installation prove troublesome.

A colourful map with screen captures of the CD-ROM greets the user when the file is opened. The map acts as a guide to the teacher or parent, detailing the activities and concepts presented within the CD-ROM. While the map is useful and of good quality, it would be advantageous if it was used in the same way within the CD-ROM to show the child the activities that have been completed.

Skills and language strategies are set out in a clear overview chart and check box format accompanying each CD-ROM file. The charts are broken up into "Reading", "Vocabulary and Language", and "Letter/Sound Patterns; Word Structure". Teachers are always on the lookout for products that make evaluation and preparation less time consuming, so it would be beneficial if the charts were obviously applicable to Australian schools. Some correlation to National English Outcomes or 'First Steps' stages would be ideal.

The Teacher's Guide describes the educational rationale for the activities presented. Blackline master sheets, assessment sheets and follow up activities are also well explained. Additionally, a useful index assists the teacher to utilise different forms of writing and reading.

A most useful feature of the product is the inclusion of blackline masters. They are clearly printed, meaningful, and relevant. Each master sheet is labelled with the name of the related CD-ROM activity, allowing easy cross-referencing for teachers. An additional resource for busy teachers is a student record sheet which allows children to take more responsibility for their learning by checking off times/dates they worked on the computer, activity performed, and the date that the computer print-out was completed. A class record sheet is also provided to summarise students' results for the teacher's easy reference.

The CD-ROMs contain all the basic material for activities. Appealing cartoon characters and puppets are featured throughout to help sustain children's attention. A positive feature is the "First Time" function, which, when selected, leads to the relevant story being presented in book-like format. The story is read to the children as they follow the text and changing illustrations. Allowance is made for children who are familiar with the stories, by providing a "Played Before" option which bypasses the reading of the story and navigates directly to the main menu. Although the product could be used by children working individually, it is
advisable to have them working in pairs so that opportunities for collaborative learning are maximised.

A “Read the story” option provides further reinforcement of language skills. Selecting the “sound button” causes the paragraph to be read by the narrator, with the words lighting up as they are read. Individual words can also be selected to hear them read out. Illustrations match the text, thereby optimising reading for meaning.

Options to Exit/Quit, Help, (Forward or Back when appropriate) are implemented in a consistent way so that navigation options always appear in a familiar way. Use of a ‘sound off’ option would also have been beneficial, for although the sound is well integrated, the inevitable endless repetition could prove distracting in a classroom environment. A more engaging product could be achieved through the provision of more interactions - additional hot spots would be advantageous in this regard. One major improvement in this area would be the use of cursors which change to indicate the presence of hot spots, providing a point of interest in the changing cursor and indicating which hot spots are active at any one time.

The ability to print out activities is an excellent feature. It provides both teacher and child with a record and a basis for further consolidation. When the print function is selected, it would be beneficial if a dialogue box was to indicate that printing is taking place (who’s experienced several copies of one child’s work in the printer!). A further useful feature would be an individual record of each child’s progress accessible by the teacher on demand. This automatic monitoring device would also allow the teacher to easily see which activities required further consolidation.

Children are able to navigate through the programs making choices about the order in which they perform activities. The educational level can not be chosen within a CD-ROM; it is expected that children select another CD-ROM at a higher stage if they need a more challenging level.

The use of a local accent would help to cater for children from a non-American background. For example, the letter ‘s’ is at times unclear, and pronunciation of words such as ‘advertisements’ as ‘advertise-ments’ is difficult to understand. The ability to customise accent, language, sounds and colours would assist in meeting individual needs. Additionally, more supporting prompts for hearing impaired children would be a welcome feature. Traditional gender role modelling is in evidence throughout the program. This could have been remedied by making minor changes that would not interfere with the story lines.

Each CD-ROM has different sets of activities and skills, providing variety, with certain important skills being repeated. Feedback is consistent and positive, although the use of clues for incorrect answers would lower any frustration levels and provide more opportunities for success. For example, in ‘The Three Little Pigs’ a wall is progressively built as children construct words in the ‘Which Word?’ activity. Appropriately used colours, graphics and text also help to emphasise important information. Most pages are consistent, clear, uncluttered, and set out logically, resulting in a reasonably intuitive interface.

Overall, a well produced set of products that are based on many relevant language and reading principles. It has many positive features, and room for improvement in the next release. It is recommended as a supplementary resource for a whole language program. Just remember to turn the volume down before you start!

REFERENCES
First Steps Reading Developmental Continuum (1994), Longman Australia Pty Ltd. Melbourne, Australia.