

# BrainSlapper

**BrainSlapper.com**

**Games for very young kids**  
*(ages 1-4 years old) [Click to play](#)*

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BrainSlapper is a video game I designed for my own infant and toddlers.

My kids have been playing computer games almost since they were born. But the games they found on the internet were always just a bit too complicated. I got tired of them getting stuck all the time, so I set out to



# BrainSlapper

**An educational “kneeslapper” for young brains.**

<http://brainslapper.com/>

## **Overview**

BrainSlapper is a highly-immersive, interactive computer experience for very young children (ages 1-4). It is explicitly entertaining and implicitly educational. It is a “serious” game, but it is also very silly. Most of all... it is simple.

BrainSlapper’s creators are parents of young children themselves. Their kids have tried playing the existing computer games aimed at this demographic, and found nearly all of them to be too complicated. It is frustrating for young players, as well as their parents, when games are designed more for an 8-year old than a 4-year old. That’s why BrainSlapper’s creators set out to make the absolute simplest computer game possible – simple enough that even a 6-month old infant can play it.

The concept takes gaming to its most basic level: information, input, feedback. Repeat. Young players are presented with various colorful and entertaining scenarios. They are then asked for input – by hitting any key on the keyboard, mouse, or a proprietary BrainSlapper usb device. This input moves the game forward, providing instant feedback, and more information, which then requires a response.

It is interactivity at its most basic level – which is just what kids aged 1-4 years old need most when using a computer. These games may seem simple to us, but they are surprisingly novel and entertaining for very young kids. These are games this age group can truly master.

Brainslapper games inspire. They stimulate. They empower. And they entertain. They are a “kneeslapper” for young minds. And they are the only game appropriately targeted towards this underserved age group.

### **Is there a precedence for this type of game?**

Yes. It’s called “Peek-a-boo,” a game that has been around for thousands of years. Peek-a-boo is probably the single most successful game design for its target age group (infants and up). Information is hidden from the player (typically by an older adult obstructing his/her face from a child), and then revealed at “strategic” moments to produce maximum laughter and delight from the player.

BrainSlapper is based on this model, but we’ve improved it in two ways:

1. The player (infant/preschooler) is in control of triggering the information reveal, and feels even more rewarded and empowered by this interactivity
2. The information progresses in fun and unexpected ways.

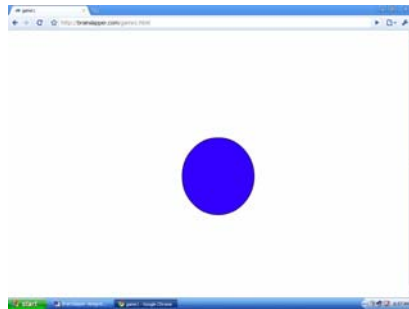
Below is a sample level from our BrainSlapper.com prototype.

## Sample BrainSlapper Level

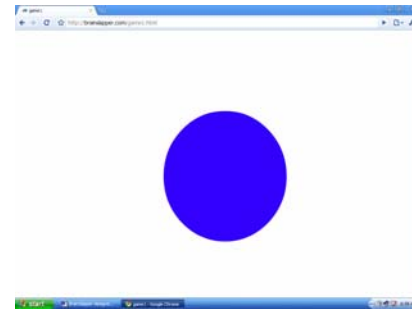
Intro screen: all rules and information are delivered visually.  
No reading should be necessary, although we will occasionally provide supplementary text.

Players hit ANY key on the keyboard to start the game.

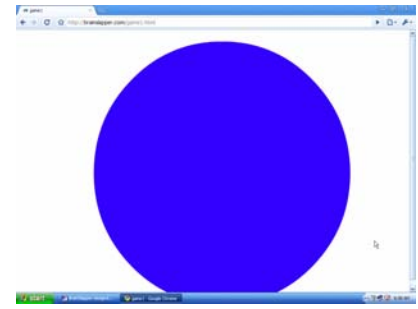
Key hits change images and sounds.



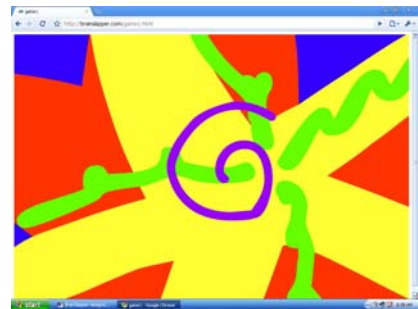
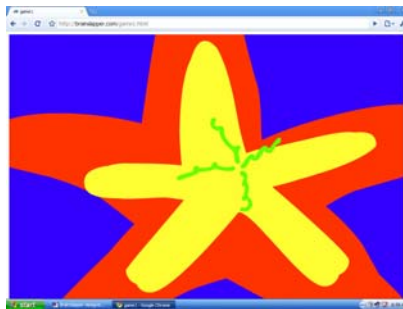
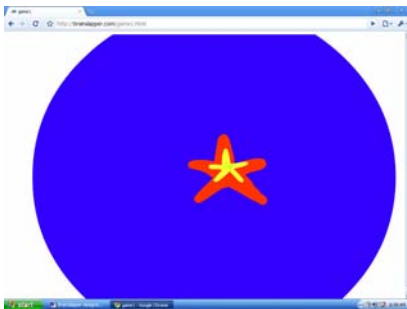
1. Hit any key.



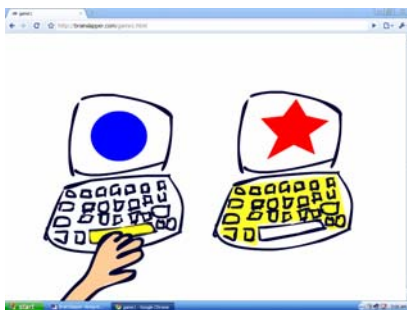
2. Hit any key again



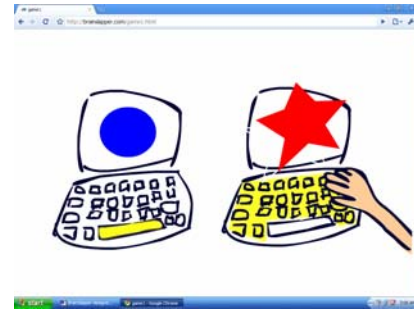
3. Hit any key again.



4. Hit any key to produce final sequence, which involves a “big finish” and visual “reward.”



5. Replay this level?



Or move onto the next level?

## **Progression of Levels**

The animation, concepts, and even some of the game-play grow more sophisticated as the game levels progress. However, the age-friendly interaction, and the info-input-feedback loop remains mostly unchanged (at least until the “Extra Advanced” Levels).

- Basic levels: images and sounds change as input is received. See example above.
- Intermediate Levels: builds on Basic Levels, and includes a timer in the corner of frame. Players must watch this timer in order to know when they can hit the keys. Hitting too early will cause the level to reset, and require a “do-over.” This is specifically designed to teach kids about the concept of time (see “Curriculum” below).
- Advanced Levels: more complex “narrative” content, and possibly more educational content (levels devoted to numbers, letters, and simple words)
- Extra Advanced Parent-Child Levels: These are the only levels requiring parental assistance. With the help of an adult, young players actually “create” their own BrainSlapper “game levels” with content they upload or build with simple tools provided on the website. This user-created content is placed into our BrainSlapper Engine and randomly altered for comic effect. Example: imagine the “blue circle” sample level above, but instead of a blue circle, the image features a picture of grandma, who is then distorted and expanded for a gentle comedic effect.

Live prototypes of the two BrainSlapper levels are available at <http://brainslapper.com/>.

The website includes the “blue circle” Level, as well a slightly more “sophisticated” storytelling level (the “red stars” level).

## **Number of Levels**

Ultimately, we would like to launch the on-line version of the game with 50 or more levels, and build more levels as the game grows. Most levels themselves take less than a minute to play. During playtesting, we discovered kids will play each level several times, and in different ways (hitting the keys slower or faster). The ultimate goal is to have parents help their children build their OWN levels, and to have advertisers commission levels that discretely support the advertiser's brand.

## **The System and Business of BrainSlapper**

There are no recurring characters or worlds in BrainSlapper yet. That's because BrainSlapper has been designed as more of a system for presenting interactive information in an entertaining and rigorously, age-appropriate manner. The system can be adapted to a multitude of different clients wishing to entertain and inform this age group. Licensing the engine and servicing clients who want their material presented with the BrainSlapper engine will be a significant revenue source.

We are also considering a low-cost subscription service or download fee for parents who want to buy additional levels for their kids, after they have successfully played the first 50 levels.

Additional revenue will come from sale of the proprietary BrainSlapper usb device. This device is literally a foam rubber brain that triggers an on/off switch when squeezed or slapped. It is connected by usb wire to the computer, and triggers the same game action as hitting the keyboard keys or mouse. It will retail for \$19.95.



## **Is this entertainment? Or Education?**

We'd love to say this game will make your kids smarter and help their brains grow to unforeseen levels of intelligence (like a certain producer of baby DVDs named after a famous dead physicist). The truth is: BrainSlapper has some educational elements, but it is primarily entertainment. Its original purpose was to provide a diverting computer experience for young children that they can handle completely on their own, without continuous parental involvement. While we don't recommend using a computer (or TV) as a babysitter on a regular basis, we recognize from our own lives that sometimes you just need to keep your kids busy for a few minutes while you make a phone call or cook dinner. BrainSlapper is our attempt to create a game that will serve this function when more traditional, low-tech toys fail to keep the kids busy.

## **That said, there IS a curriculum**

Even though it's primarily entertainment, we have still incorporated several educational concepts into the gameplay. Here are some things it can potentially teach:

Time and Patience – The concept of “time” is profoundly abstract for children under the age of 5. This should be obvious to any parent who has ever told a child to “wait a minute.” BrainSlapper games literally ask players to “wait a second” (or more) before they hit the keys. If they input too early, the game level resets to an earlier stage. Thus, the game specifically rewards players for demonstrating a small amount of “patience.” Some levels even include “clocks” with second hands, requiring children to actually watch and understand the movement of a clock before making input. This “time” curriculum is one of the most unique and important educational components of BrainSlapper.

Emergent Technology Skills – The concept of providing input and receiving output from a strange box (computer) is a new experience for a young child. Anyone who has seen their child break or otherwise misuse a computer will welcome the chance to practice the rudimentary computer usage skills taught by BrainSlapper games.

Cognitive Skills – BrainSlapper teaches humor. Each BrainSlapper interaction produces a safe, but incongruent change in the previous image that is designed to provoke laughter. Humor is a learned cognitive skill that facilitates all kinds of other learning and social development. Unfortunately, most humor in today’s media (even in preschool games and shows) misses the mark for this audience. The difficulty level of the humor in BrainSlapper is specifically geared towards the cognitive level of this young audience, making it more enjoyable for the audience as well as more productive for their learning and development.

Emotional skills – BrainSlapper is easy for kids to master, building confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of mastery. BrainSlapper is empowering – who knew a little kid could so easily control such a complicated machine as a computer?

Physical skills – The actions used while interacting with the computer during BrainSlapper games should encourage the development of a variety of physical skills, including gross motor skills, fine motor skills, perceptual motor skills, sensory motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and impulse control.

Numbers, Letters, and the Usual Preschool Stuff -- Certain levels will include numbers, letters, and standard preschool concepts (shapes, directions, colors, etc.). Kids get a lot of exposure to these cognitive concepts in all their other media and toys, so BrainSlapper approaches them more as a “bonus” educational content, and not the core focus of its curriculum.



## **The Creator**

John Derevlany has more than 15-year of experience creating and developing television programming for preschool children and older viewers. He created the preschool dance and movement show “Animal Jam” for the Jim Henson Company, which ran on Discovery Kids and The Learning Channel for more than six years. He also adapted the Theodor Geisel (“Dr. Seuss”) film “Gerald McBoing Boing” into a preschool TV series for Cartoon Network. “Gerald McBoing Boing” was one of the first TV shows to be specifically built around a curriculum that fostered “humor skills” as a learning and developmental tool. Other preschool projects he created included “Griffin’s Quest” for the Disney Channel (designed to teach “moral reasoning” and “moral imagination”), and “Lamb Chop’s Clickety Clack” (a music and song-building show starring the Shari Lewis puppet). Shows for older kids he developed include “Wayside” (based on the Louis Sachar book, still airing on Nickelodeon and Nicktoons), and “Monster Buster Club” (Disney XD). He was most recently story editor for “Kick Buttowski” on Disney XD. He is the father of a 4-year old and 11-year old who inspire much of his TV and game design work.

## **BrainSlapper Specs**

### Rendering System

2D Flash, Flash Lite, javascript, and the new CS5 “Flash for iPhone”

### Platforms

Primary: Internet – game can be played on PC, Mac, and flash-compatible mobile devices  
Secondary: disc-based for PC/Mac, and wii.

### User Interface

Keyboard, mouse, and/or proprietary BrainSlapper usb input device.

### Sound Design

We have two simple rules about this:

(1) Don't be annoying. There's nothing worse than having to listen to a miserably-catchy game song that repeats endlessly while your children play. All songs will be more soothing and relaxing than “hooky.”

(2) Sound and effects will be designed to “reward” all input from viewers. One of the main reason kids will play this game is to hear the funny SFX and warmly-reassuring music.

### Game format

Single-player.

Length: Games can last from a few minutes to an hour or more, depending on how many times levels are replayed, and how comfortable parents are with their child's exposure to digital media. There are a variety of opinions from experts on how long a young child should play a videogame. We don't recommend any specific length, other than to have the parent decide.

### Gameplay

Input: hit the keyboard (or input device), to make an image and sound change.

Scoring: No points, but players get a visual and aural “reward” for actions.

Rules: don't hit the keyboard or input device too quickly, or the game level will reset to an earlier stage.

Objectives: enjoy changing sounds and images.

Advanced objectives: with help of parents, players create their own levels with artwork they upload or create on the site. Game randomly alters these player-created images each time it receives input.