

Software Evaluation: GollyGee Blocks

Title: GollyGee Blocks

Publisher: GollyGee Software, Inc.

Grade Level: Unspecified

Price: \$25.00 per CD-ROM

Overview

GollyGee Blocks is a three-dimensional building block program that allows children to construct, color, and decorate scenes using 3D blocks, shapes, animals, people, letters, cars, and other toy-like objects. Children can zoom in and out, and rotate the scene to see it from different points of view. The program is different from the real world in that children can move, stretch, scale, rotate, and add color and texture to their objects. Children can also either stack objects or merge them together to create new composite shapes.

Technical Features

- Easy to install
- Somewhat large for what it does (7-8 MBytes of hard drive space)
- Available for Mac or PC
- Operates in full-screen mode only. This is good for younger children who might otherwise be distracted or confused by windows, menus, and icons from other programs. On the other hand, the program changes the screen resolution and takes over the desktop which might be confusing for older or more experienced children.
- On some systems (Windows 2000, for one) the program seems to utilize 100% of the processor time even when nothing is happening.

Teacher Features

- Students can take snapshots of their scenes to print or store in a scrapbook. This might be useful for assessment or in conjunction with other class activities. For example, children could illustrate stories, or use the program as CAD (computer aided design) software for design or engineering projects.
- Voice and sound effects accompany some menu or button selections. The voices are available in English only.
- The user interface is very simple in some respects. There are no advanced customization options for teachers.

- Not many people are represented in the software—there is a cowgirl, an alien, a robot. The girl is a grey-ish color by default, and all of the objects can be painted with a wide variety of colors and textures.
- The icon to erase shapes is a bomb, and exploding sound effects accompany its use.
- Many lesson and activity plans available for purchase or online from the GollyGee blocks website.

Child Features

- Depending on the age level, the user interface may be quite confusing. It is especially difficult to move and manipulate shapes. Often mouse movements do exactly the opposite of what you would expect.
- The program could be potentially frustrating for children who are trying to construct more complicated objects. For example, it is also easy to move or color the wrong object.
- The child is completely in control of the pace and direction of the program.
- GollyGee blocks is very similar to a drawing program in many respects. Students can create anything they want. On the other hand, there are perhaps too many pre-fabricated shapes.
- The program encourage only limited experimentation, and it lacks the precision and control necessary to design complicated structures such as buildings.
- Overall, the program is fun and engaging, and offers students an open-ended, creative tool. It seems best if teachers can incorporate its use into other classroom activities and investigations.