



Sitter Solutions

Stuck again with no help on date night?

BY MEGAN CHAMPION

Finding a trustworthy sitter to watch your children on a regular basis (like for Friday date nights) can be tricky. But, knowing the basics of what to look for—and what to pay—can ensure that your evening out and away from the kids is a stress-free experience.

Make sure potential sitters are confident and knowledgeable when they interact with your children by having a working interview. Ask for current copies of first aid and CPR certifications, and provide a list of allergies, contact numbers and house rules. Although your own kids may not be old enough for Facebook, Foursquare and Twitter, don't be afraid to ask

your sitter to avoid using social media to ensure the children's privacy and safety.

Typically, sitters charge between \$8-\$15 per hour, depending on the age and number of children they will be caring for. Throw in a few extra bucks if the pets need to be fed, washed or walked.

Another option is hourly child-care centers like KidsPark in Avondale that offer drop-in care for all ages, 7 days a week from 8 AM to midnight. Bonus: the kiddos get to play with others their age in fun and structured activities. One year registration at KidsPark is \$25, with rates running \$2-\$8 per hour. *



Seuss Celebration: Can you jump in a bounce house? Would you, could you, with a mouse? OK, so mice may not be allowed inside a bounce house, but children certainly will be at the **Dr. Seuss Birthday Party** at the Nature Center of Omni Amelia Island Plantation. The free party, which starts at noon on March 3, will also include *Cat in the Hat* games, finger painting activities, a birthday cake in honor of Dr. Seuss, nature tours and story hour with the Nature Center's new mascot, Tanner the Turtle. More at ameliaisland.com. * BY NATALIE WEARSTLER

AN APPLE A DAY

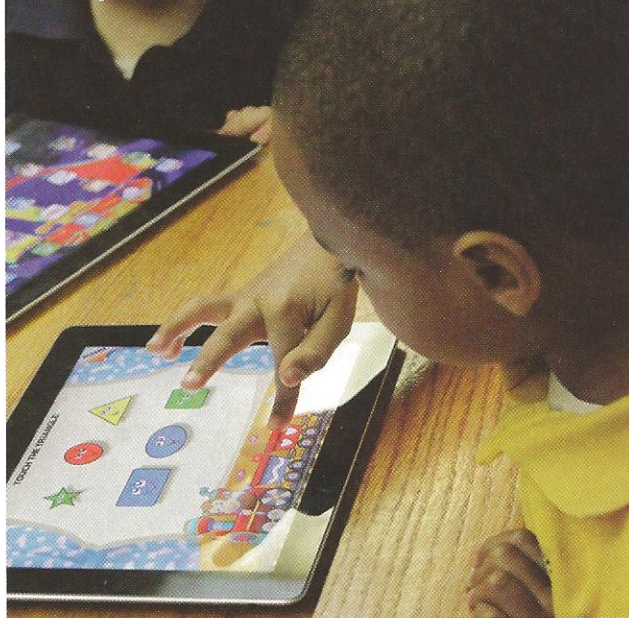
E-textbooks come to the First Coast

BY ANNA RABHAN

Since the 2007 release of the first e-reader, teachers and curriculum developers have waited for the day when such devices would be in the classroom. Five years later, one Jacksonville school is taking a major step forward: University Christian School, a private K-12 school, will become the first in Northeast Florida (and only the third in the state) to use iPad textbooks beginning in the 2012-2013 school year.

About a year ago, UCS's administrative team, board and teachers agreed that they had to create a learning environment involving collaboration and innovation for the rapidly changing 21st century in which their students live. Head of School Heath Nivens says, "There had to be an element involved where kids were basically being trained for the future when even we, as educators, weren't certain what that future would be." After consulting and visiting other schools that had chosen a variety of ways to better prepare kids, the group decided that incorporating the iPad would provide the flexibility UCS's students need, and a partnership with Apple's Learning Initiative program followed shortly after.

University Christian School



PARENTS

The obvious advantage of using the iPad for textbooks is, of course, the elimination of all that paper. However, the apps and software UCS plans to incorporate provide more far-reaching advantages. Schoology, a learning management tool with the look and feel of Facebook, will allow students and teachers an unprecedented level of collaboration. "It allows the teachers to continue to challenge students on their own turf," says Nivens.

One issue often raised in the implementation of e-textbooks is cost. At UCS, parents will purchase the iPad and the school will waive the \$700 textbook fee. The school plans to teach students the life skill of being good digital citizens, which includes caring for their device, the pitfalls of the Internet, classroom conduct and more. Such skills will serve them well in an adulthood that will likely include many e-devices and the need to interact successfully with people as well as with technology.

For parents of public school students, purchasing an iPad may not be a practical investment, which raises the issue of technology upgrades in public versus private schools. Dr. Terri Stahlman, chief technology officer of DCPS, cites funding, inconsistent digital standards, the cost of professional development for teachers and support as key challenges to technological upgrades within Jacksonville's public classrooms. Recent DCPS technology upgrades have dealt mostly with teacher planning and instruction software, but E-textbooks aren't far behind.

"With the recent announced change requiring that 100 percent of instructional resources be available in digital form by the 2014-2015 school year, the timeline for implementing additional electronic tools has been defined," says Stahlman.

As the first school in the area to adopt tablet-friendly textbooks, University Christian School has a lot to accomplish. But Nivens is sure the payoff will be worth the work.

In the meantime, Nivens is excited to see how his students adapt to the change. He reports that students involved in iPad initiatives from schools as far away as Minnesota and as close as Savannah quickly adjust to the new way of learning. "They felt like they had more access to their teachers and better access to material that they struggled with than they did prior to an iPad implementation in their school," he says.

And as those prognosticating teachers and curriculum developers might have guessed back in 2007, student use of e-reader textbooks will grow. "Within the last three weeks," Nivens says, "we've had probably three or four phone calls from local schools saying either, 'Tell us how you're planning on doing this,' or, 'When you get finished, we want to come talk to you about all the things that you would do differently.'" *

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