

XARA X1

Schemes of Work Supported: N/A

System Requirements: Windows 98+, Intel Pentium 200MHz, 64MB RAM, 500MB HD space, CD-ROM

Contact Details: www.xara.com

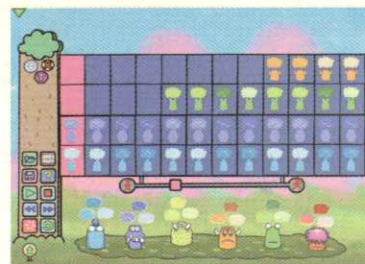
Price ex. VAT: £99; 5 licenses

Xara is a drawing program, similar to Freehand or Illustrator. Thus it is useful for both Art and Design and Technology classes. It creates vector graphics, which can be resized without losing resolution, unlike the bitmap images created in paint and image manipulation packages such as PhotoShop.

This is a professional program, used by many practicing artists and thus contains hundreds of features, dozens of options and the ability to create very sophisticated images. Consequently, it's not a product we'd recommend for anyone below KS4, and even then, considerable application is required to get the most out of the program.

Several features set it apart from the competition in this area. The first is the price. Professional illustration packages can cost several hundred pounds, Xara costs less than one hundred. The second is speed. Complex illustrations can seriously impact on your computer's performance. Xara redraws the screen very quickly – up to five times faster than competing programs.

IN BRIEF: Xara offers excellent value where a professional-quality drawing package is required. It isn't for the faint-of-heart, though.



MORE MUSICAL MONSTERS

Schemes of Work Supported: KS2 Music QCA 8-13, and others

System Requirements: MacOS 10 or above with G3 processor or Windows 98+, Intel Pentium 400MHz, 64MB RAM, CD-ROM, speakers or headphones

Contact Details: www.q-and-d.co.uk

Price ex. VAT: £35

More Musical Monsters is a tool for creating musical compositions. There is a grid and six monsters underneath. Each monster plays a different instrument. Click on a monster's thought bubble to enter notes by drawing short, medium or long lines onto a grid, representing different note pitches. Go back to the main grid, add the piece you've just created and then continue with a different monster until the composition is finished. The composition can be played from the program, or saved as a Midi file. The program is thus suitable for creating both very simple melodies or advanced compositions, depending on how big and full you make the grids. It is probably best suited to younger KS2 children, where the bright, bold presentation is extremely inviting and will hold children's attention. Teacher options include disabling, save or exit, but these are not password protected.

Particularly noteworthy is the extensive curriculum documentation and the study plans that come with the product.

IN BRIEF: A fun introduction to musical composition that is very well presented and has been well-linked to the expected curriculum standards.



ESPRESSO (TIME)

Schemes of Work Supported: All KS1/2 – Time is for KS1 Maths

System Requirements: Web-based, Windows 98+ or G3 Mac recommended

Contact Details: www.espresso.com

Price inc. VAT: £6 per pupil per year

Espresso is a subscription service rather than a product and includes terabytes of resources for primary schools. The site is updated several times each month with new activities, news videos and projects.

The Time module is one of the latest updates and includes activities to do with the calendar, using a clock, frequency and rates. The module's home page, found under Maths 1, is typical in that it has a brightly coloured, labelled illustration which leads into the six subsections of the topic. The style of illustration is bold and quirky, in keeping with many children's books, and is consistent across the resources.

Each subsection contains either video clips or activities. In Time, there are nine activities and 14 high-quality videos. There are also review sheets to help with record keeping. The activities tend to be quite quick tasks that could make a good start to the day's activities, but which will need repetition away from the computer in order to sink in.

IN BRIEF: A jaunty and varied set of resources and activities which is consistent with the high standards set in Espresso's other modules.